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INVOKING
THE SACRED
JOURNEYS
INTO ʿASHURA
AS RITUAL & ART
ACROSS TIME
& SPACE

DENA
AL-ADEBI

2007

2007/90

The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

INVOKING THE SACRED: JOURNEYS INTO 'ASHURA AS RITUAL AND ART ACROSS TIME AND SPACE

A thesis submitted to

The Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology & Egyptology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Masters of Arts

In Sociology-Anthropology

By **DENA AL-ADEEB**

Under the supervision of **Dr. SORAYA ALTORKI**

December 2007

The American University in Cairo

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Has been approved by

Dr. Soraya Altorki
Thesis Committee Advisor

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Thesis Committee Reader

Dr. Chad Haines
Thesis Committee Reader

Department Chair — **Date** — **Dean** — 17 DEC 2007 **Date**

DEDICATION

To my parents, siblings and extended family.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First I would like to thank both my parents: Adnan Al-Adeeb and Majda Al-Atrakchi for their unconditional support and commitment throughout graduate school and especially during the process of writing this thesis and creating the installation. I would also like to acknowledge both of my siblings: Zena and Mohammed Al-Adeeb for their encouragement, sustenance and emotional backing during trying times.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to use gender as an analytical tool to interpret—both materially, through the installation project, and a written text—sacred space and ritual. Focusing on Karbala and *'Ashura,* I examine the processes whereby three generations of Iraqi Shi'a women, through rituals and sacred spaces, negotiate and reconstruct their identities vis-à-vis the Iraqi state, the U.S. invasion and its aftermath. These women are "speaking" from different geographic locations—Iraq, U.S., U.A.E. and Cairo—as well as socio-economic positions.

Focusing on the relationship between the cityscape of Karbala and its pilgrimage industry, this project examines how different agents (such as the Ba'th regime, U.S. occupying forces and media, Karbala security forces and larger community) have used and continue to use *'Ashura* and the city of Karbala as a platform for a wide range of political projects that consistently influence Iraqi Shi'a women's identities.

In this thesis, through a gendered lens, I invite the reader to embark on a sacred journey through metaphorically walking through the installation space in an attempt to identify the layers of meaning and history which these material objects symbolize and signify.

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Introduction

The Project

This thesis integrates both the multi-sensory experiential – in women's ritual practices and my art installation – and the written – my thesis – as interpretive and analytical methods to investigate how Iraqi Shi'a women experience and reconstruct sacred space and ritual. The thesis serves as a lens into multiple historically-informed and conditioned narratives and experiences that shed light on silenced histories of Iraq, Iraqi Shi'a and diasporas. The art installation and written text provide a conceptual structure to analyze my own experiences, which themselves are but a part of the experiences of three generations of female members of my family. I evoke my own experiences and those of other women to tackle marginalized histories, and to shed light upon the tumultuous present realities in Iraq and its diasporas. I bring into play the tragic events of the battle of Karbala[1] in the exhibit and interweave it throughout the thesis in order to explore its expression in rituals. I chose these creative practices in order to elucidate their methods of dealing with oppression and trauma, which in turn provide mechanisms for healing and transforming individual turmoil into collective memories while instigating resistance. I utilize a similar approach to that of the Karbala tragedy and *'Ashura*[2] rituals to map out through memories, a narrative based on my own and that of the women's stories and creative practices.

The thesis and installation are a doubly reconstructed project since my documentation (films and photography) of my trip to Iraq in 2004 was stolen. I was, therefore, determined to find alternative methods (the thesis and an art installation) to relay the information and document my experiences and encounters. Both the thesis and

the art installation required a different method, focus and strategy of research. Hence, I decided to enroll in the MA program at the American University in Cairo (A.U.C.) in the Anthropology-Sociology Department in order to obtain the skill set and training to develop my research and approach. I produced this thesis and an art installation by combining the training I received with re-creation from memory of the lost material. Hence, most of the interviews and encounters in the thesis are based on my memories.

In this thesis, I welcome the reader to enter into a sacred journey which encapsulates my interpretation of Karbala, *'Ashura*, the sacred and women's reconstruction of identities, by figuratively walking through the four rooms of an art installation which I created in Cairo, Egypt in 2006. The installation was an attempt to explore the meaning of narratives, sacred spaces and rituals. The material objects in the rooms symbolize and signify my intent to represent the past in light of the present. I ask you (the reader) to experience, similar to the audience, my re-construction of the pilgrimage place provide an interpretive gendered meaning to *'Ashura*, the cityscape of Karbala and Shi'a narratives. I intentionally address the reader as 'you' while escorting her/him symbolically into the physical space of each room of the exhibit space. By doing so, I provide you (the reader) with a conceptually visual as well as textual simulation of the installation.

This work highlights the centrality of understanding the relationship between the written (Shi'i) texts and creative expressions (such as the performances I attended and describe as well as my art installation). Through such creative practices, the text is resurrected through keeping a history and a memory alive. And as the reader engages with *these* written texts, I hope it will become clear to him/her how powerful the link is

between Shi'a rituals and women's creative traditions, and how they are fused into imaginative expressions that tap into the participants' senses and powerfully move them into catharsis.

The art installation, the subject of much of this work, used an approach similar to that of the very rituals I work on; I attempted to weave together text (thesis) and art (installation) in order to provide an experiential and multi-sensory experience to the reader and the audience. I also attempted throughout this project to experimentally tackle different modes of communication and expressions in order to decipher multiple histories of Iraq, Iraqi Shi'ism, and the women, while creating a healing process for myself, a member of a family that lived through much of the tragedies of Iraqi Shi'a in the last few decades. Thus, the written thesis complements the visual exhibit by providing a text based analysis not only of my interpretations, but also that of the women I represent in my study as well as the theories I engage.

The sacred as deployed in this thesis and the art exhibit can be understood as religious convictions by these women. For the women the sacred is God and through intercessors such as the Prophet and *ahl-al-bayt,* their prayers would be accepted. Since I wanted to explore how these women cope with their struggles during the tumultuous realities surrounding Iraq, I began to explore their experiences and feelings of the sacred and ritual. Hence, I construct the sacred in this thesis and in the installation as an individual and collective experience and a feeling. For me, the experience is of what I define as sacred sites (Baghdad, Karbala, lost homes etc…) which at different moments I was displaced from and could not return to for many years. I found that through the creative practice of reconstructing the sacred through the thesis and the installation, I was

able to capture these experiences and feelings in order to make sure they are represented and not forgotten. I hoped that by working through such creative practices that I will be able to map out a healing process in order to understand them through interpretation and praxis. Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat's work in *Dangerous Liaisons* possibly shed light on my quest, "they represent an attempt at grappling with the meaning of location and belonging, of communities of interpretation and praxis, of home, in the increasingly diasporic panoramas of the contemporary world."[3] Initially, I thought that by invoking the sacred, I was perhaps reaching for a transcendental experience of what Homi K. Bhabha calls the "unhomely moment" manifested through the installation and the thesis. Later, I came to understand that my engagement might be related to what Homi K. Bhabha calls a "transit" moment. Homi K. Bhabha suggests that:

> The present that informs the aesthetic process is not a transcendental passage but a moment of "transit," a form of temporality that is open to disjunction and discontinuity and that sees the process of history engaged, rather like art, in a negotiation of the framing and naming of social reality – not what lies inside or outside reality, but where to draw (or inscribe) the "meaningful" line between them.
> The unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence.[4]

Setting the Stage

> Does a specifically feminine sacred exist? What place is there for women in that history dating from the birth of Jesus, what chance for them two thousand years after him? What about the feminine in Judaism, in Buddhism, in Confucianism, in Taoism, in Islam, in the animist religions of Africa and elsewhere? How is it understood or misunderstood, but also what future, what prospects does it have? If, as we believe, it is true that women will awaken in the coming millennium, what can the profound meaning of that awakening of that civilization, be?
>
> Catherine Clement and Julia Kristeva[5]

I returned to Iraq in 2004; it was a journey marked by an increasing preoccupation with the notion of the sacred. I sought out ways to make sense of the complexity and extent of suffering and atrocities inflicted onto the Iraqi landscape and its people who daily embody the terror and tragedy of the destruction by the invasion, wars, and totalitarian state. How is it that people endure and cope with their realities? How does the invocation of the sacred allow for the expression of their daily experiences and how is that expression germane to their resilience? The reach for the sacred through the ritual of *'Ashura*, amidst the decay of the present, allows for a manifestation of the metaphor of salvation. I found that it was limiting and partial to confine my attempts to reckon our current reality solely through intellectual processes. In addition to the political and economic frames of analysis, I found it necessary to explore the people's daily experiences – a perspective that is often marginalized by others working on present day Iraq. Creative and spiritual practices, including ritual, performance, visual art, music, literature and narratives, were the additional dimension that more fully represented these experiences. In addition, these expressions could potentially reconstruct the narrative to lead to a healing process and inspire hope (as will be evident through the accounts of female members of my family.) A focus on creative and expressive practices allows for

the recognition of women's contributions to historical, political, cultural and spiritual processes that might otherwise be marginalized.

My focus on women's practices was invoked by my encounter with female members of my family in Baghdad, and later in Karbala, during the month of *Muharram*[6], when *'Ashura* is commemorated. I documented the ritual through film and photography; it was the first *'Ashura* celebrated with this magnitude in decades as it was banned under Saddam Husayn's regime for over thirty years. It was there that I understood that people chose creative and spiritual practices to express their struggles in the face of random violence and organized gruesome repression. These expressions include, but are not limited to: *Ta'ziyeh,* the theatrical ritual (referred to in literature by Peter Chelkowski on Iran as the Shi'i 'passion play'); the ritual of *Qirayeh*, mourning gatherings that eulogize *ahl-al-bayt* (the House of the Prophet); the creation of religious and political murals, posters, installations and altars; and mass political protests. These practices are steeped in the tradition of commemoration of the battle of Karbala; they express the trauma that *ahl-al-bayt* experienced and reflect the manner in which this trauma shaped Shi'i identity and politics. Hence, women's creative practices became the main constructs of my research which shaped the explorations of the commemorations of the Karbala battle.

The narrative of Zaynab's (Imam Husayn's sister, Imam Ali's daughter, and Prophet Mohammed's grand-daughter through his daughter Fatemeh) role at Yazid's[7] court became one of the defining moments for these commemorations. Her cathartic recounting of the traumatic events of the battle of Karbala served to honor Husayn and the resilience and courage of his seventy two followers and family members who were

butchered in that battle. As tradition has it among many Shi'a, her testimony came after witnessing the brutal battle and massacre of her brother, sons, and other family members and after she was chained to the surviving women of the House of the Prophet and dragged from Karbala to Kufa in Iraq, then to Yazid's court in Damascus. Her powerful reaction to the tyrannical Yazid, and dramatic presentation which so movingly re-enacted these atrocious events, and her affect so inspired the assignment of guilt to the betrayers of *ahl-al-bayt* as well as a profound empathy for those martyred, that it awoke a religious, creative and political movement. Her impact was so significant that her commemorative narration and performative practices were adopted as one of the defining expressions for the survival of a marginalized community (i.e. the Shi'a). The manner of presentation invoked an emphatic emotional response which underscores its historical impact.

Since her presentation was performative and contributed to manifesting a creative practice, those who re-enact it experience and embody the details of the tragedy so that the performance of elaborative somatic expressions becomes a conduit for spiritual awakening. The narrative is, thus, turned into a sacred quest for salvation. The ritual is a holistic spiritual, physical, and emotional practice that allows for a deeply engaged experience that - because it is situated and finds voice in the body - becomes a journey and practice that moves believers through lamentation into action and social movement. More specifically, the inner and embodied meditation toward the sacred is translated through expression and performance into an external act that coalesces community, so that the collective practice becomes an instrument for spiritual transformation that motivates political conviction and healing.

Through my participation in *'Ashura* and through interviews with female members of my family (before, during and after the visit in 2004), I witnessed women participating in *'Ashura* weaving the contemporary Iraqi catastrophe into the Karbala narrative (which I will elaborate on in the section titled *Attending the Qirayeh Ritual*, page 54.) Their evocation linked the trauma of the present to the memory of the past. Hence, constructing present and past memories through narratives, performance and other creative practices provides a space for women to work through past and present traumas, which could possibly provide a healing process both personally and collectively.

My film and photographic depiction of the aforementioned inspired the art installation and a graduate thesis. These projects inspired me to utilize the Karbala account and Zaynab's role as vehicles in order to craft a narrative that reconstructs *'Ashura* and the domain of the sacred both as an alignment of the implicit efficacy of the practice and a reinterpretation that centers the female voice. This gendered re-visioning speaks directly to the patriarchal tendencies that subordinate women's leadership and voices; particularly the manifestation of the sacred into organized religious practices, which historically and structurally are oppressive.

It is unmistakable that Karbala, *'Ashura,* and Shi'ism have come to occupy global importance after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Recently, overwhelming international attention positions Shi'ism and Shi'ites in an important and strategic place in world affairs, and the global media has narrowed its gaze on everything related to Shi'ism and Shi'ites in Iraq. I wanted to personify *this* historical moment, and represent the marginalized perspective of the Shi'ites who historically have been relegated to the peripheries of society.

One can find numerous readings on the subjects I tackle, such as: the sacred, ritual, narratives, memory, trauma, healing, transnational and diasporic communities, Shi'ism, Iraq, art and creative practices. The significance of this research is to combine aspects of these varied literatures and weave together these multiple genres through a multi-sensory and experiential project (the art installation and thesis). Through utilizing such an interdisciplinary approach I suggest the need to tackle these subjects through new methods and interpretive tools. Hence, I propose that the study of the sacred and ritual both by anthropologists and other social scientists is in need of a holistic approach.

I contribute through knowledge production by providing an innovative perspective and approach to dealing with trauma and healing. I suggest that feminist anthropologists might want to reconsider their approaches to the study of trauma which is concerned with sharing women's traumatic experiences. Instead, I employ Shi'a ritualization of creative expressions which not only centers women's experiences but also offers methods which base these women's experiences within its mechanisms. I also attempt to manifest and expand the concept of 'Visual Anthropology,' which involves a multi-sensory approach to the experience of cultures. It promises to provide an alternative way of comprehending culture-perception constructed through multi-mixed-media installation.

Situating Myself and Others

The *Sacred Spaces* project – the exhibit and thesis – has become a site to investigate, reinterpret and reconstruct my own identity and family narratives. In sharing the narratives of the female members of my family, I hope to insert their unheard voices into the public sphere in order to reconstruct an overlooked history of war, displacement, ethnic cleansing, violence and other related experiences we have undergone. It has also served as a tool to explore my own healing process of coming to terms with past traumas and multiple forced displacements.

My first encounter with displacement served as a catalyst to grasp the fluid, shifting and destabilized nature of identity, home and belonging. At age five, members of my father's family were deported from Iraq to the Iranian borders, as a result of the deportation campaigns waged against Iraqi Shi'ites of presumably Iranian descent,[8] carried out by the Ba'th regime during the 1980s. In response, my immediate family avoided the forced deportation by escaping to Kuwait. From a young age, I began questioning constructions such as borders, nation-states and citizenships. In retrospect, I realized that they were created in order to organize and control masses based on political interests by the governing elites. Even though my family was deported, we continued to identify as Iraqis. We never spoke about our deportation amongst ourselves, and especially kept quiet about it in public. The second time I encountered displacement was during the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. This time my family relocated to San Francisco, CA. Our initial encounters in the Bay Area were shaped by the launching of the Gulf War. Hence, throughout our residence in the Bay Area, as marginalized immigrants, we

experienced a microscopic gaze and interrogations of our identities and belonging. I have realized that identities are constantly transforming, ever changing constructions based on how we are positioned in societies and how we choose to position ourselves. Photographs have always been instrumental in remembering our ruptured and fragmented experiences. For example, when my mother went back to Iraq for the first time after the first Gulf War, she brought back with her our photographs. Our memories and the photographs served as the main tool for us to reconstruct our pasts.

The ruptures and the state of in-betweeness that I experienced growing up became a position for me to explore my multiple and complex identities. The ruptures did not cause discontinuity, but rather a continuity flavored by layered and multifaceted experiences. The ruptures and traumas that I and others in my family experienced became a place for me to investigate my own and others' healing processes. I chose creative practices, such as visual art, rituals and narratives as a way to deal with and express the meanings of our experiences. I aimed, in the exhibit, to capture the fluidity of the relationship between my own healing and the need for providing a collective healing space. This project also seeks to engage other women who have experienced war, displacement and other forms of violence. By sharing my own and that of female members of my family's experiences in this document, I hope it may be of use as a reference point to provide methods for healing processes for women who have gone through similar encounters. I hope to contribute to defining this historical moment (post-invasion stage) by creating a space for creative practices and narratives in the public realm in order to engage in this reconstruction process.

I was born in Baghdad in 1974, though both my parents were born and raised in Karbala. They grew up experiencing and performing the rituals of *'Ashura.* In 1980, members of my father's family were imprisoned and later executed. Other members of my father's family were deported from Iraq to Iran, though some were able to resettle in Syria and the U.S. In response to these events, my immediate family escaped to Kuwait. Commemorating *'Ashura* in Kuwait became a private practice. My mother continued to commemorate *'Ashura* at home during *Muharram.* She played cassettes of the *Radoud* (chanter or bard), and wept as she cooked *Kemma*, a dish customarily cooked during *'Ashura* as a *nadhr*[9] and distributed among neighbors, friends and the community. Occasionally, she would take us to private female *Qirayeh's* either at a friend's home, or at a communal female gathering at a *Husayniya*—in reference to Husayn; which is a place where the mourning gatherings are held.

Growing up in Iraq, Kuwait, and then later in California, I did not principally identify with Shi'ism or with performing the ritual of *'Ashura.* First and foremost, I identified myself as an Iraqi, and as an Arab, even though one of the reasons my family was deported from Iraq was because they were not considered purely Iraqi, or wholly Arab: my father's family was 'accused' of having Iranian roots. With the passage of time, I began to explore, and at times assert, my complex identity: Iraqi, Arab, Shi'a, immigrant, diasporic and of Iranian descent.

In retrospect, I can conceive of my return to Iraq in 2004—to work on the documentary, photography project, experience the situation in Iraq first hand, the reunion with my family, and participating in the *'Ashura* commemoration—as a sacred journey or pilgrimage; it was a quest for both an internal and external voyage to sacred spaces.

These sacred spaces are not just physical—i.e. external, such as my trip to Iraq, the annual commemoration of '*Ashura* by the female members of my family, and my reconstruction of sacred spaces in my exhibit in Cairo. Rather, they are also about exploring the layered internal spaces that relate to the external. For example, my need to return to the physical spaces (Iraq, family home, Karbala, Baghdad, etc...), or the making of the physical exhibit, are inseparable to my own internal quests, whether they be intellectual questions or spiritual undertakings, such as my preoccupation with the notion of the scared. Above all, I explore these phenomena of internal and external sacred spaces not just through an intellectual endeavor, but also through spiritual and aesthetic modes to make sense of the world's dire condition. I also realized that the relationship between the internal and external quests by my mother and other female family members was in many ways similar to my own. These women's physical journeys to sacred places, such as the shrines, are very much tied to their internal quests to achieve relief. My mother's need to return to Iraq, her old home in Baghdad and Karbala and other such memorable places, served as locations to explore her own internal search for finding closure to her traumatic dislocation from her homeland and family. These women, like me, engage through ritual with the sacred in order to deal with their struggles.

In his analysis, Alan Morinis also examines this aspect in the preface to *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*:

> Pilgrimage is a paradigmatic and paradoxical human quest, both outward and inward, a movement toward ideals known but not achieved at home. As such, pilgrimage is an image for the search for fulfillment of all people, inhabiting an imperfect world. The metaphor is well used, but there is still an important perspective to be gained from seeing both pilgrims and anthropologists as people of culture. An anthropological study of pilgrimage is a conversation about life, suffering, and the pursuit of ideals and salvation.[10]

The exploration that Morinis and I refer to here is not merely an introspective and individualized quest, but rather, it is a reflection on the political, economic, socio-cultural realities we are experiencing. Morinis suggests that the examination of the human condition through the lenses of sacred spaces and pilgrimages, both by anthropologists and social scientists, is in need of a holistic approach. In his analysis, Morinis also examines this aspect:

> Pilgrimage eludes the attention of the traditional researcher who takes a fixed socio-cultural unit, such as village, as the subject of study. Pilgrimage also tends not to fit into conventional anthropological categories. It is rather a composite process pieced together from elements of mythology, ritual, belief, psychology, social roles, architecture, geography, literature, drama and art, and spiritual concerns. Pilgrimage partakes of the mystical, and nothing is less amenable to investigation by social sciences.[11]

Through my work, I came to realize that in post-Saddam Husayn Iraq, women's interaction with, and my own use of, new technologies (such as film and photography) in ritual practice serves to extend Karbala beyond Iraq's borders, by connecting it to the outside world and transnational Shi'a communities. Iraqi Shi'ite women thus embody continuity and change, "[h]istorically, both the structure and the meaning of *'Ashura* and these lamentation events have been fluid, incorporating different elements in different locales and reflecting the changing political and social status of Shi'a Muslims (...)."[12] Keeping in mind the fluid interpretations and meanings as well as the dynamic structures of ritual practice, I focus on a part of *'Ashura*'s modern discourse, which is used to instigate political action and change today.

Filming women's lived experiences was my attempt to tackle questions related to positionality, personal narratives and experiences. I also wanted to reconstruct the history that is being assembled to include my voice within women's narratives. By interviewing female members of my family and constructing the exhibit, I wanted to demonstrate the

link between the personal and political, the sacred and the mundane, the visible and invisible, and the local and the global. I also wanted to break away from the constructed gender discourses and dichotomies of public versus private spaces by shedding light on the intimacy of private space and to demonstrate how these women negotiate and maneuver public space.

Methodology

I returned to Iraq in 2004 to experience first hand what was happening on the ground as a result of the second Gulf War, the neo-colonial occupation led by the United States and its effect. I also wanted to be reunited with my family members and hear their stories and accounts of the war and its impact on their lives. In addition, I brought with me my camera equipment in order to document, both through still photography and moving film, these narratives and to chronicle the horrific effects of the devastation inflicted upon the Iraqi terrain and its people. My initial inquiries did not merely focus on the sacred and rituals, though as my research developed, I became more intrigued by such concepts. As mentioned earlier, since my material was stolen, I had to find alternative methods to produce the work, hence the art installation and thesis became my tools to engage further into this study. I decided to expand my research and delve further into the relationship between reclaiming memories and narratives through the sacred and ritual in order to achieve catharsis while healing past traumas.

In this inquiry, I chose qualitative research methods. I mainly relied on unstructured and informal interviews with female family members and other women I encountered at lamentation ceremonies held in private homes and public *'Ashura* commemorations. I also drew on participant observation of ritual and creative practices in Baghdad and Karbala during my visit in 2004 of *'Ashura* ceremonies. These encounters enabled me to listen to personal experiences, reflections and memories. Most of the interviews, creative and ritual practices that revolve around the commemoration of Karbala were filmed, tape recorded, and/or photographed for the purpose of producing a

documentary and a series of photography exhibits. Most of the interviewees were enthusiastic about speaking to me, though some chose not to be filmed but preferred an informal conversation. All interviews were conducted in Arabic. I spoke in Arabic when addressing the interviewees. My own reflections are in Arabic and English. Including Arabic, English and subtitles in the film was part of my attempt to reach a larger audience and tackle some of the issues of responsibility and accessibility. By definition, the process was heuristic and reflexive.

However, the paradox emerged when I arrived back in the U.S. to attempt to develop the photos and to work on the documentary. I flew into San Diego Airport and was en route to San Francisco, on my drive up the car was stolen with everything in it, including the 70-hour footage and the 150 roles of 35mm film, except for one 35mm film. This film survived since it was in my jacket pocket which I processed upon my arrival to San Francisco. After processing the sole film, I found that it contained footage of my first night in Karbala. I decided then that I would not quit the project and will make full use of this one film. Since I could no longer work on the documentary film or the photography projects, I sought alternative means to relay the work. Shortly after that incident I decided to go back to graduate school in order to write a thesis and construct the exhibit. Hence, I constructed the entire exhibit and this thesis based on this specific 35mm film and my memory. This was the same film that became the showcase in the third room of the installation, a representative of my work, trip and project. I also used the photos from the 35mm film and the documentary film as research tools. Since only one of the 35 mm film survived the theft; I had to present it in the exhibit and as my point of reference during my research process. I referred to the photographs numerous times in

order to describe the contents, which were of art installations constructed by community members in Karbala. Luckily, I had a chance to view some of the material of the documentary film (which was of a female lamentation ceremony) before it was stolen. Hence, I had a chance to review my material and have a more recent recollection of the ceremonies and interviews.

Since the documentary film was stolen, most of the women's reflections were retrieved from memory based on conversations and encounters we have had in the past, though some were later added through phone and Skype (e-telephony which is an internet based phone) conversations. Still, it was difficult to reach by phone or Skype most of my family members in Iraq and other parts of the world because of their specific circumstances (since most of them are dealing with traumatic circumstance and Skype is not accessible to most of them).

I interviewed approximately 50 women ranging in age from 15-75, though in the thesis, I mainly include approximately the 10 women in my family (my aunts, mother, cousins etc). I chose to focus on female members of my family for practical reasons since I could always refer to my knowledge of their lives and histories. They would also be much easier to contact in the future if I needed more information. I decided to focus on female members of my family because I was interested in mapping out my family's narratives as a case study which could shed light on the history of Iraqis who suffered many forms of repression and were made to live in diasporic conditions and whose experiences as men and women have hardly been documented, let alone studied. I also hoped that the process of narrating our pasts through memories could itself be healing.

Interviewing my mother (who now resides in California) and *Um* Ali (my aunt who now lives in U.A.E) demonstrated how they continue to practice these rituals though it might look different than the way it is practiced by my aunt (*Um* Kathem) who lives in Baghdad and my cousins (Lubna and Luma) who still live in Karbala. Hence, each female family member's geographic location and socio-economic position affects how these rituals are practiced. Most interviews took place at participants' homes, but some occurred in public spaces while observing and taking part in *'Ashura* commemorations. The other women I interviewed were present either at lamentation ceremonies or in public spaces in Karbala during *'Ashura* celebrations. I interviewed some of these women repeatedly and often randomly, I also, by virtue of family ties, spent a lot of time with them; thus I gained insight into subject matter. Some of the female participants were introduced to me through female family members and I was therefore able to speak to them at length. The main theme addressed in the interviews concerned these women's memories of trauma (war, occupation, repression, death, dislocation etc…) and how they endured and coped with them. The other theme in the interviews tackled their relationship with the sacred through ritual and creative practices.

The interpretation and analysis of the project is informed by ethnographic data, participating in rituals and observation of creative practices, interviews with audience members who attended the installation as well as texts written about the subject matter.

I employed varied literature including, but not limited to, Shi'ite lamentation poetry and eulogies by Bassem Al-Karbalai[13], as well as Karbala narratives by Shi'ite clergyman Mohammad Bahr Al-Uloom and the great Medieval Muslim historian Ja'far ibn Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari[14] (d. 923 A.D.) and the contemporary Sayyid Muhsin

Al-Amin (d. 1952). I used other texts such as a briefing Paper of International Educational Development prepared by Kristen McNutt and Zainab Al-Suwaiji work in "The Iraqi Holocaust Files." I also utilized Taraneh Hemami's work and reflections who creatively experiments with similar artistic themes and approaches to the study of the sacred and its relationship to diasporic and transnational identity.

I informally interviewed audience members during the opening night (November 12th 2006) and throughout the three week exhibit. A year later, I emailed several audience members, requesting their reflections, encounters and interpretations of the 'Sacred Spaces' exhibit. Four audience members (out of the twenty) responded via email. Their reading of the exhibit influenced my perception of the work and enhanced my perspective on how to construct the thesis. Hence, some of their comments were inserted throughout the chapters. I chose to interview audience members who I had a personal and or a professional relationship with. I also asked academics and artists whose area of interest and expertise overlapped with the exhibit.

Audience Members Interviewed

Jalaa' Abdelwahab: A friend who conceptually, artistically and technically supported me throughout the process of making the exhibit.

Tarek Al-Akkad: A Faculty of Arts Affiliate in the Department of Performing and Visual Arts at AUC. I met Tarek during the opening night of the exhibit. He was very impressed with the exhibit, especially the way it was spatially construed in relationship to the architecture of the rooms. Hence, he invited me to present a lecture the following week to his Architecture students. I accepted the invitation provided that it would be sponsored by the Department of Performing and Visual Arts and made public so others could attend. The experience proved to be rewarding. I was also able to receive feedback from the students

Huda Lutfi: Professor of Arabic Studies at AUC, visual artist and an acquaintance. Huda provided technical suggestions and recommendations at the beginning of the project.

Ann T. Shafer: Assistant Professor of Art and Art Program Director, Department of Performing and Visual Arts at AUC. I met Ann during the opening night. We met several times during which she gave me her reflections on the project.

Women Most Frequently Interviewed

Um 'Ali (my aunt on my mother's side) who is a retired English high school teacher in her late sixties had to leave her home in Iraq to U.A.E with my elderly and ailing grandmother due to the upheaval in Baghdad. Also, since her husband passed away and her children immigrated to U.A.E in hopes for a better future, she had no reason for staying in Iraq.

Um Mohammed (my mother) who was an Arabic high school teacher and now works with my father running their own consulting engineering firm in Northern California. She is in her early sixties. She has experienced dislocation twice during the 1980s and the 1990s.

Um Kathem (my paternal aunt) is in her late seventies-early eighties. She still lives in Baghdad, Iraq in an embattled neighborhood with her daughters. Two of her sons were executed under the Ba'ath regime, in response her two other sons fled the country. Most of her family has been deported during the 1980's.

Lubna (my maternal cousin) is a school teacher in Karbala, Iraq. She lives with her immediate family including her brother-in-law and nephew. She is in her early thirties. She is attempting to leave Iraq.

Luma (my maternal cousin) is also a school teacher in Karbala, Iraq and lives with Lubna and her immediate family. She is in her late twenties. She has been trying to leave the country with her husband and son for the last few years.

The *Mullayah* has been performing lamentation ceremonies since her childhood. She was trained as a child by another *Mullayah* who took her in as her apprentice. She was in her mid forties.

Abu Sarhad (Lubna and Luma's father) is in his late seventies or early eighties. He lives with my oldest aunt and his two daughters; they tend for him since he is bed-ridden. He does not want to leave Karbala since he is old and ill, though is willing to relocate for his family.

Women's Creative Practices

Women's creative practices can be seen at times "as contestatory acts in active resistance rather than in the manipulation of cultural material."[15] Not all creative practices are sites of resistance; some actually reproduce hegemony. My focus in this thesis concerns certain creative practices performed by the women and in my own projects (thesis and installation) as contestatory acts in active resistance. Women's practices become a place for transforming their marginal positions in society into an actual presence, and a "vehicle for resistance to cultural hegemony and sociopolitical oppression of official ideologies and the formation of critical alternatives to dominant discourses."[16] Minimally, women's creative practices give voice to their varied experiences and expressions that have been historically marginalized. Women's creative expressions provide insight into their lived experiences, as well as their transnational and diasporic realities, which are not bound by one geographic location or cultural identity. Hence, as Homi K. Bhabha states, creative practices and performance offer these women a place to explore their "inter" or "in-betweenedness" of culture and cultural identity.[17]

Transnationalists and diasporic communities invoke collective identities based on ethnicities and/or nationalities to forge communities, at the same time individual differences do emerge. In her exploration of hybridity as a third perspective emerging from the initial two cultural components, Ruba Salih affirms that transnational state of 'in-betweenedness' opens up new spaces and positions:

> Hybridity, according to Bhabha, is not the creation of a third part which originates from the fusion of two original cultural elements, but is rather a 'third space which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives.' A third perception illustrates

> the experience of displacement in terms of diaspora, where migrants as diasporic subjects embody the disjuncture between identity, place and culture.[18]

Women's creative practices—such as performance, visual art and ritual—attempt, at times, to transcend the constraining realm of verbal communication, and offer multifaceted alternatives to express, heal and understand deep and hidden knowledge and trauma within the unconscious, or express the conscious as it fails to convey meaning through uttered words. In her article titled: "What Does Creativity Have to Do with Intercultural Communication," Kathryn Sorrells articulates how creative practices may bridge the gap between cultures, and how they provide a tool for intercultural communication. Sorrells suggests that the

> language of imagery, metaphor and symbol are powerful teachers. These nonverbal modes of communication often bring forth information, perspectives and understanding that might otherwise remain buried. By gaining access to people's creativity, we tap a remarkable reservoir of potential energy that can be used to facilitate intercultural learning and communication.[19]

Nonverbal communication provides a different way of comprehending history and culture-perceptions constructed through creative practices. Creative forms of expressions are highly symbolic in nature, which may, indeed, tap into different realms of consciousness and meaning providing personal and cultural transformative spaces for healing and communicating.

Rosalind Shaw advises us to be cautious of "drawing an oversimplified dichotomy between the verbal and the nonverbal." She suggests that it has been evident that "far from being literalistic, linear chronicles, oral narratives are more often complex condensations of cultural and historical meaning in images and metaphors."[20] In an attempt to tackle the link between memory in nonverbal forms and practices, she proposes investigating a "theory of practice." Shaw puts forward that "a theory of practice is also a theory of memory that suggests a different way of 'remembering' the

past, in which not only everyday choices (...) but also violently dislocating transregional processes (conquest, colonialism, migration, war, wage labor) are rendered internal, are (literally) incorporated into people and their social and cultural practices."[21] Ortner, according to Shaw, suggests that these social and cultural practices reconcile "the impact of external events by shaping the ways in which actors experience and respond to these events."[22] Hence, rituals in which the body is known to be acting as a memory aid may also be seen as inducing healing. Shaw proposes that ritual as memory is "the capacity to reproduce a certain performance', with respect to commemorative rituals through which participants reenact the past in explicitly mnemonic performances. In commemorative rituals, the past is not only remembered cognitively but also embodied; it is through such embodiment, moreover, that these rituals "work for their participant" and are ... persuasive to them". "[23] Morphy suggests that performances of rituals are fluid and contingent, though the final product retains its essential coherence in terms of its reference to the basic narratives that it enacts.[24]

Oral history projects—similar to creative practices—attempt to produce different, opposing and marginalized histories based on the narratives of those who have been excluded, e.g. women and older generations. Howard Morphy proposes that "the experiences of the older generation are unrecoverable, except perhaps in the form of oral history."[25] Selma Leydesdorff states that oral history emerged from the study of migrant experiences, since their experiences "can only be studied through interviews."[26] She states that it is through the field of cultural studies, in its focus on identity and representation by means of oral history projects, that a shift occurs from the study of migrant experiences through interviews to a particular consideration of transnationalism and to include, diasporic narratives and experiences. In the context of displacement, these narratives and oral history projects have become a location to express migrant, transnational, and diasporic women's experiences, which center on family relationships that spawn across multiple geographic locations.[27] Thus a new development has occurred: "In this development, the story of the family narrative may be dominant, but it is also experienced differently depending on gender. Gender determines the way in which the family history (and thus the migration) is remembered and told. . . . Gender intersects here with the family."[28]

These women's experiences transgress the borders of the nation state to include multiple geographic spaces; hence, these women attempt to reconstruct and weave the ruptures of their lives through resorting to memories and family narratives. Basch, Glick-

Schiller and Szanton-Blanc suggest that migrant (women) are active agents in their constructions of their daily lives, and their fluid experiences find expression in their creative practices "through the use of symbols, language, and political rituals, migrants and political leaders in the country of origin are engaged in constructing an ideology that envisions migrants as loyal citizens of their ancestral nation-state."[29] At the same time, "transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states."[30] These women find themselves expressing multiple identities that are rooted in different locales. Their narratives and creative expressions seek to bridge the gap between their lived experiences that "account for the rapidly shrinking sense of time and space in the world today."[31] Memory and narratives are mechanisms for these women; they enable them to work through their own traumas, and allow them to initiate their own healing processes.

Hence, constructing memory through narratives, performance and other creative practices provides a space for transnationalist women to work through past traumas, and begin their healing process, both personally and collectively:

> Memory, tradition and religion are written in a type of narrative normally associated with fiction. It seems predictable that religion and tradition will therefore be on their future political and cultural agendas as well. All writers rely on their autobiographical experiences. In this kind of literature the borders between autobiography and work on memory are often fluid— a factor that I strongly believe will continue to influence the field of oral history. But for the most part, migrant memories are not part of the regular scientific tool kit.[32]

Creative practices (including rituals) became a place for women to insert their narratives in order to acquire a place in the public realm. Memory and narratives became a means for women to heal and work through traumatized pasts. Coping with war, rape, genocide and other forms of violence perpetuated against women necessitated breaking the silence

that has been traditionally enforced upon them by societies and families. Women's voices became influential in shaping grassroots movements, policies and discourses on violence against women. Breaking the silence for women, meant breaking the barriers imposed on them by patriarchy, colonialism, racism, homophobia and other oppressive structures. It also meant that women might be able to escape their isolation through sharing their own stories and hearing other women's stories. Hence, women's narratives could lead to healing individual trauma and pave the way for constructing therapeutic mechanisms for collective trauma.

Memory and narration by women, may also lay the ground for inserting an alternative historiography on transnationalism, narratives of war, and other forms of violence. Selma Leydesdorff suggests that:

> (...) modern historiography has transgressed the boundaries of the nation-state - and hence of national histories - new histories have emerged, in particular the histories of women who do not fit in with the heroics of national histories. Civil war always brings a special type of suffering for women (...). Women (...) are just beginning to talk about their experiences, partly to cope with their trauma and partly as grounds for compensation. Rape is never mentioned in written sources; it is always told by the victim. Sometimes those witness accounts are oral histories and life stories, and sometimes the interviews serve as part of a body of testimonial literature. That these enter the academy and are taken seriously is one of the merits of women's studies over the past decades. That discipline should also be credited with ensuring that war is no longer exclusively the domain of masculine memorial culture in which so-called "acts of war" mute the female voice in the civil population.[33]

Similarly, in "Gender in Transnationalism," Ruba Salih examines the ways in which texts create a gendered subject. Salih also investigates how interacting individuals connect their lived experiences to the cultural representations, and how subjectivities are shaped by belonging to multiple locales. Salih also examines conventional models for understanding personhood and place-making, which, she argues, proves to be inadequate for capturing the complexity of contemporary patterns of migration, diaspora and transnationalism. She asserts that migrant women at times, narrate their past through

viewing videos and photographs as a tool to reconstruct and reinterpret their identities and histories. Salih explains "watching a video becomes almost a ritual where emptiness is filled through the recall of particular episodes that happened during family weddings and other celebrations."[34] Hence, these women are able to recreate a sense of community and connectedness to their families and pasts. Salih explains that identities are reconstructed through memories turned into narratives. These narratives are based on the imagination of the individual and how they might want to reconstruct their story in order to serve a purpose, such as: loneliness, nostalgia, building an imagined community and healing trauma, etc. Reconstructing one's identity is also determined by the way "we are positioned and position ourselves within the narratives of the past."[35] Hence, identities are fluid and ever changing. Ruba Salih used the case of Leila (a Moroccan immigrant to Italy) to illustrate "how photographs may constitute a sort of life memory store containing and symbolizing a historical representation of the multiplicity of women's identities (...)."[36] Similarly, I conceive of *this* work (the art installation which includes photography and thesis) as a composition of a "life memory store."

I realized that the presentations of the installation, film and thesis, in essence, are an articulation and reconstruction of identities—both mine and others—and an attempt to articulate an omitted and marginalized history and voices. The elucidation of the stories of the women (female members of my family) I interviewed, and my own accounts, was instrumental in producing a narrative, which has been omitted from the larger public discourse. In revealing these women's narratives and experiences, I hope to provide a public space for them to share their stories.

Ella Shohat suggests that the Third World and its diasporic communities have begun to rewrite their own histories and narratives in the face of "Eurocentric historicizing." She asserts that these communities are crafting their own images and representations. Shohat explains that such communities are speaking in "their own voices, reclaiming and reaccentuating colonialism and its ramifications in the present in a vast project of remapping and renaming. Third World feminists, for their part, have participated in these counternarratives while insisting that colonialism and national resistance have impinged differently on men and women and that remapping and renaming is not without its fissures and contradictions."[37] Rosemary Sayigh also engages in such counter-narratives by focusing on conceptualizing a female nationalist subject "whose narrative subverts the dominant one through revealing what the national narrative has effaced, historicizing the home, gender, and sexuality, and resisting actions and experiences that would otherwise be forgotten."[38]

Karbala Narratives

The birth of Shi'a Islam was based on the dispute over the *khilafa* (succession of the ruler) after the Prophet's death in 632 A.D. It is commonly believed by Shi'a that the *khilafa* had to be bequeathed to 'Ali due to his kinship, close relationship to the Prophet and also due to the fact that they believed the Prophet had, in fact, chosen 'Ali before his death. In contrast, Sunnis believe that *Abu* Baker was elected by the Muslim community to be the *khalifa* (successor), since he was older than 'Ali and more experienced and thus, possessed astute leadership qualities. 'Ali did not protest the *khilafa* at the time since he feared the Muslim community would become fragmented. It took 'Ali two additional *khilafa* terms in order to finally become the fourth *khalifa*; hence, for the Shi'a, it was unjust for the *khilafa* to skip 'Ali three times before becoming the fourth *khalifa*. For this reason, they consider 'Ali to be the first *Imam* (the first successor and leader of the Muslim community).

Muawiyah, elected by the council (*shura)* to be the *khalifa*, fought 'Ali, and his successor Husayn, over the *khilafa*. 'Ali was eventually assassinated and although Ibn Muljam was responsible for his death, Shi'a believe Muawiyah was the mastermind behind his assassination. Husayn was then forced to sign a peace treaty with Muawiyah. After Muawiyah's death, the *khilafa* could be claimed by Husayn, but Yazid— Muawiyah's son— intervened, sending his army to Karbala to kill Husayn and his seventy two followers.

The Karbala narratives epitomize Shi'i history; thus, as Kamran Aghaie eloquently affirms, "[t]his basic battle narrative then must be placed within a universalist

narrative which begins with Adam and ends with the return of the *Al Mahdi*[39] all of which has historically been included by most Shi'i scholars within the 'Karbala narrative'. "[40] '*Ashura* rituals gather the believers to relive the experiences of the battle of Karbala through narration performances which include lamentation and eulogizing techniques—building emotionally-charged and evocative mental images. The result is an experience where time and space are collapsed since believers are thrown into what Victor Turner has termed a "liminal"[41] (in-between limbo state) experience, where they relive the events of the battle of Karbala through what they hear, witness, and chant in the present.

I, therefore, employ William O. Beeman's work on *Ta'ziyeh* (ritual theater, literally means expressions of mourning) to demonstrate the liminal position of participants, as he sees "the liminal status of the audience as performer-spectator, existing both within the present and in the past". In the following extract, Beeman describes the scene whereby dramatic action merges with the audience's personal experiences:

> The actors in the drama express their sorrow and grief through the verbal text of the performance, but it is the people in the audience who provide the explicit, forceful, and sometimes violent expression of grief and mourning which is absent from the performance representation. Thus they complete a portion of the dramatic action which is otherwise lacking.
> The explicit expression of grief produced by the spectators, however, are prompted by their own life experiences, and only triggered by the presentation of the events they witness... Indeed, the audience is exhorted to weep for their own sins, their own troubles, remembering how much greater was the suffering of Hussein and his followers.[42]

The participants can only lament the *Imam*, and feel the pain of his martyrdom through reliving, remembering and articulating the past which produces a sense of catharsis.[43] The cathartic impact of the ritual and narrations works through the powerful emotions it creates.[44] Their encounter with the past becomes a reflection of their present reality, shedding light on people's daily struggles and sufferings. The events that took place in 680 A.D. in Karbala thereby become the lens through which the present narrative is

articulated and retold by rituals, narrations, murals, installations, music and other creative practices.

Throughout my encounters in Baghdad and Karbala during *'Ashura* in 2004, I witnessed narrators and participants weaving the Karbala narrative into their present situation. For example, while attending a women's *Qirayeh* ceremony, the female narrator weaved the historical tragic narrative of Karbala into the horrific conditions Iraqis are undergoing. She encouraged female participants to remember Zaynab's anguish over the loss of her entire family. The narrator invoked Zaynab's suffering for her brother and family to demonstrate that her loss was greater than any other affliction these women are undergoing. The narrator invited the female attendees to learn from Zaynab's resilience and character in order to overcome the present horrifying realities in Iraq. At an *'Azza* (mourning ceremony) hosted by my cousin's family for the death of her husband, my cousin mourned the loss of her husband while performing the *latm* (chest beating). As the female narrator recounted the heartbreaking bereavement of the Karbala tragedy reciting lamentation poetry that speaks in Zaynab's voice, my cousin accompanied by close family members, created a small circle in the middle of the room and began soberly weeping. In order to build up to a catharsis, the narrator intensified and varied the tone and rhythm of her voice and chest beating as she recounted Zaynab's depictions in vivid details of the gruesome slaying scene of Husayn as arrows darted one by one piercing his bloody body. The female narrator impersonating Zaynab began forcefully wailing as she beat her chest powerfully in lamentation for witnessing her brother's horrid beheading which instigated my cousin and the women around her to begin performing fervent *latm* in front of each other as they wailed passionately.

The mounting tension in the room provoked everyone to fiercely cry and participate in the call and response protocol while performing intense *latm.* The situation fueled my cousin's grief as she entered a state of frenzy while continuing to frantically weep and beat her self. The women around her forming a circle in the middle of the room continued vigorously wailing and chest beating, though one by one took turns facing my cousin as they accelerated their weeping and chest beating to match hers as a sign of solidarity in sharing in her pain. Once they realized that my cousin had reached her threshold, they intervened by holding her as they escorted her out of the circle. The female narrator then began to gradually decelerate the fervor and momentum of her moving performance, until she came to a halt.

In her article, *Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain,* Veena Das offers an excellent example of the connection between body and language in lamentation:

> In the genre of lamentation, women have control both through their bodies and through their language – grief is articulated through the body, for instance, by infliction of grievous hurt on one self, "objectifying" and making present the inner state, and is finally given a home in language. Thus the transactions between body and language lead to an articulation of the world in which the strangeness of the world revealed by death, but its non-inhabitability, can be transformed into a world in which one can dwell again, in full awareness of a life that has to be lived in loss. This path toward healing –women call such healing simply the power to endure.[45]

Similarly, in the context of *'Ashura*, the connection between body and language in lamentation, as a mourning ritual, is evident in the example above. The lamentations are expressed physically through *latm* and verbally through recitations and the call and response ritual. These expressions are deeply connected to a particular approach to life and a methodology of dealing with death: as a consequence of the Karbala tragedy a

mourning practice was crafted to provide tools for the oppressed to inhabit a world that is marked by violence and death.

This meta-historical event continues in the present day to provide a framework of mourning in order for participants to endure their pain while projecting themselves outside of their present horrific realities to a past which is considered to be marked by the gravest unjust act done to the family of the Prophet. At the same time, participants may also project themselves in the future where they may be able to struggle against injustices and prevail over them. If they were not able to triumph over tyranny in the material world, then they might achieve salvation in the thereafter. Hence, the historical narrative is repeatedly evoked in order for participants to cope with and transcend their specific suffering during a time of horrific violence and loss in Iraqi modern history. Even though the female participants were mourning the suffering of Husayn and his family, they were also mourning their own and that of their family's losses and desolating experiences. My cousin was in fact grieving the loss of her husband and the women took part in consoling her, though they were also grieving their own losses as well as collectively mourning the heartrending demise of the Prophet's family. The historic narrative depicts the men as martyrs, while the women are represented as the heroines who endured humiliating captivity until they reached the courts of Husayn's enemy, Yazid, where they transformed the calamity into a victorious movement. Zaynab's defiant, rebellious and expressive language and approach inspired a ritualistic practice that is translated through language and the body.

Um Mohammed (my mother) affirms that both men and women hold *'Aza* ceremonies when a member of their family is deceased. She asserts that the narrator often

intertwines the loss of the family's loved one with the *maqtal* (slaying) narrative of Husayn and his family. Men demonstrate grief by weeping for loosing a family member, though they do not participate in performing *latm* for the loss of their loved ones. Rather, men frequently perform *latm* publicly during *'Ashura* in commemoration for Husayn's death. She maintains that women exhibit their emotions more explicitly through collectively performing *latm* and weeping in private during *'Aza* ceremonies as a tribute to the loss of their loved ones and to *'Ashura.* Thus, both men and women express their grief through language and the body, though women are able to intertwine their personal loss with that of the Karbala tragedy openly. My mother maintains that women are able to display through weeping and *latm* while interlinking their own loss with that of Zaynab's. Since Zaynab initiated the tradition of commemoration, it is accepted for women to carry these traditions through generations. Hence, the tragic events of the past become a means of expression for participants to release their own suffering and hardships at present. The believers thus live simultaneously the past and the present.

Although the historical Karbala narrative is the focal point of the ritual practice of *'Ashura*, the relation between historical narrative and ritual practice is far from static. It is a dynamic relationship, where changing political and social realities influence the ways narratives are produced and the ritual practiced. Thus the ritual expresses the current situation in Iraq, and the horrific impact this reality has on women's lives. It is only through accounts (such as this one) and experiential presentations (such as the installation) that we can attempt to map the particular conjunction between narrative and ritual in the present day since this conjunction is always dynamic, shifting over time to address the needs and realities of participants. *'Ashura* serves as a powerful site for

mediating between the two worlds of the spiritual and the material. It also serves as a place for facilitating redemption and salvation,[46] since "early Shi'ites viewed Hussein's death as a sacred redemptive act, so the performance of the *Muharram* ceremonies was believed to be an aid to salvation. Later, they also believed that participation, both by actors and spectators, in the *Ta'ziyeh* dramas—the theater of ritual—would gain them Hussein's intercession on the day of the Last Judgment."[47] My mother contends that any act of commemoration such as performing the rituals, weeping, visiting the shrines could bestow on participants Husayn's intercession at the end of the temporal world.

The performance ritual bridges the gap between the horrors people live through and the spiritual, sacred and divine. Hence, the ritualized performances mediate between the tragedy people experience on a daily basis and the possible encounter with the ethereal. I attempt to map out these creative expressions by inserting my own interpretations (through the thesis and the installation) and that of the women I engage with, not merely to replicate feminist projects which focus on the functionality of oral history and healing trauma, but rather to contribute by including the transformative aspects of sensory experiences through spiritual practices as sites of resistance. For example, through lamentation, women can endure their adversity, while such ritual practices may provide healing mechanisms and a space to manifest their resistance against a neo-colonial occupation and a regime that has attempted to eradicate their practices. Together, visual symbols, chants, sounds, performances, smells, and food, all create a complete visual and sensory experience that gives *'Ashura* its meaning and magnitude. As Faleh A. Jabar illustrates "Muharram ritual is a cultural discourse in which various visual symbols, sounds, narratives, performances, smells and food are integrated

in a complex whole. The ritual builds a spiritual edifice from bricks of mundane objects and cultural paradigms. In the ritual, participants 'encounter the symbolic universe that underpins and gives shape to their deeply held beliefs'."[48] The images, symbols, and rituals one sees are creative expressions that add to the narrative, memory, and the history they recount and dramatize. All of these components of the *'Ashura* experience combine to develop the solidarity of the community, and to emphasize its resilience, and strength against challenges, suffering and violence.[49]

'Ashura is characterized by its epic and tragic quality, dramatizing symbols that arouse strong emotions of suffering, and also charge the believers into mass mobilization against injustices (which I will elaborate on later in the text); thereby strengthening their solidarity, sense of belonging, identity, and community. Mahmoud Ayoub's work on *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* sheds light on the ritual's purpose:

> The death of Husayn serves a strong basis for identity and cohesion in the *Shi'i* community, as well as a basis for the integration of all creation into the community's spiritual history. Great emphasis is laid on keeping the memory of this tragic event alive by all possible means, in spite of opposition, hardship and persecution. From the beginning, the impetus was provided by the *imams* themselves, who promised great reward for the tears of devotees. The promise of eternal bliss and security nourished and even encouraged the hopes and aspiration of the community for a better life even in this world. Hence, the concept of *jihad* (holy struggle) gained a deeper and more personal meaning. Whether through weeping, the composition and recitation of poetry, showing compassion and doing good to the poor or carrying arms, the *Shi'i* Muslim saw himself helping the *Imam* in his struggle against the wrong (*zulm*) and gaining for himself the same merit (*thawab*) of those who actually fought and died for him. The *ta'ziyah* [mourning ceremonies], in its broader sense the sharing of the entire life of the suffering family of Muhammad, has become for the *Shi'i* community the true meaning of compassion. Empathy with the *imams* is expressed through weeping and recitation of elegies and the performance of the entire *ta'ziyah* ritual.[50]

Hope and victory are interwoven into the struggle for justice, which is assumed to be rewarded, either in this world, or the next. William L. Hanaway, JR. explains "Hussein's sacrifice of himself is to bring salvation [eternal life, light] to the rest of the Shi'a community until the return of the twelfth *Imam* at the end of time...The individual

sufferings and martyrdoms all drive toward or derive from the martyrdom of Hussein. Evil triumphs in individual plays, but the ultimate result of Hussein's sacrifice of himself is the salvation of the community. At this point, evil is defeated."[51]

At the same time, believers are not passive spectators awaiting their salvation; through their active participation in mourning and commemorating Husayn and his family, as well as in struggling against oppression, they will redeem themselves and triumph against evil and injustice. Hence, they must continue to suffer as a means to achieve redemption and salvation. Their struggle against injustice is the quintessential component of the faith. Mahmoud Ayoub eloquently elaborates on the centrality of struggle in belief, "As one of the essentials of faith, *jihad* [the struggle in the way of God] must be regarded as an act of worship, bringing high reward in the hereafter with God. Thus *Shi'i* sources speak of the reward (*thawab*) for weeping for the sufferings and afflictions of the Holy Family and especially for the death of the martyred *Imam* Husayn."[52] Hence, both men and women demonstrate their suffering through weeping and performing the *latm* as a form of devotion and a means to salvation. Thus, to be martyred for the cause of *jihad,* one will be granted the highest rank of martyrdom and can finally join the legendary and heroic martyr *Imam* Husayn.

Order of Chapters

In chapter one, I will figuratively walk the reader through room one as I share depictions, narratives, images and characters of the Karbala battle as expressed through women's creative practices while conceptualizing them as memories turned into narratives and artistic productions (through the thesis and art installation) aimed at healing trauma.

In chapter two, I will construct the quest for the sacred through the art installation relating it to the quest pursued by pilgrims to the shrine scene. I will provide an interpretation of the shrine setting as it correlates to the journey traveled by pilgrims across time and space. I offer insight into women's practices and narratives as they relate to the concept of marginal and unseen (the silhouettes) and central and seen (shrine).

In chapter three, I will provide the reader with an experiential encounter with room three of the installation. I will explore the state of in-betweennes of transnationlist communities as it connects to women's creative practices. I provide insight through the photographs and the women's stories into the cityscape of Karbala and ritualization of creative practices as sites of resistance.

In chapter four, I will briefly share the contents of room four as it connects to the concept of reflection in order to conclude.

Chapter One

Reconstruction of the Sacred

I began my reconstruction of the sacred by conceptually, visually and materially constructing a journey into *'Ashura* as ritual and art. I created a four room art installation which was held at the Falaki Gallery at the American University in Cairo (AUC). The exhibit was open to the public for the month of November 2006. The exhibit was supported and funded by grants from various departments, institutes and schools through AUC. I filmed the process of setting up the installation and the opening night so I may include the footage in my forthcoming film project.

The exhibit was a site-specific installation. The design and architecture of the rooms shaped and influenced how I conceptually built and designed the installation. I originally had a vision and a plan of how and what the exhibit would look like, but the venue required a re-envisioning of the exhibit. The set proved to be advantageous to the experience I wanted to invoke. I wanted the audience to experience my artistic reconstruction of a sacred journey through the pilgrimage place (the installation and Karbala) while offering an interpretive gendered meaning to *'Ashura*, the cityscape of Karbala and Shi'a narratives through an audiovisual sensory experience. I also wanted to manifest visually my own processes of grappling with today's dismal conditions as an Iraqi living in the diaspora.

The audience was invited to participate in aspects of the ritual (such as tying the green ribbons around the lattice of the shrine) as well as to interact with multiple objects in the room. The narratives on the walls provided the audience with insight into the

project as well as the Karbala Narrative. The audience senses were stimulated by smells, sounds and sight in order to draw them into the experience I had constructed through the art installation. The audience was encouraged to partake in these experiences while engaging their own interpretations as participants. This was done in the hope of experientially drawing the audience into the performance of *'Ashura,* sacred space and the art installation. The installation was not merely an artistic project, or an intellectual pursuit, but rather a spiritual quest through the ritualized process of making and producing art.

In this section I will briefly map out the structure and contents of the exhibit space in order to provide (you the reader) with the overall framework of the space and art work. Later, in each chapter, I will describe in depth the various contents in the rooms and detail the significance and meaning of the material objects and their symbolic relevance to the project. The relation of the rooms to each other facilitated a fluid flow for the audience. The first room was connected to the second room, while the second room was connected to the third and fourth rooms (See Figure I.1. Floor plan on the following page). The audience walked into the main hall which gave them access to the entrance of the first room. They then walked through the rooms consecutively until they reached the final room which led them back to the main hall. This means of access provided the audience with a sense of a circular movement that began and ended in the same place, yet their encounter and experience might have shifted their perspective and position. This was done in pursuit of simulating the spiritual quest pilgrims undergo in their performances of rituals where they end up in the same place they began, though their encounter with the sacred might have transformed them.

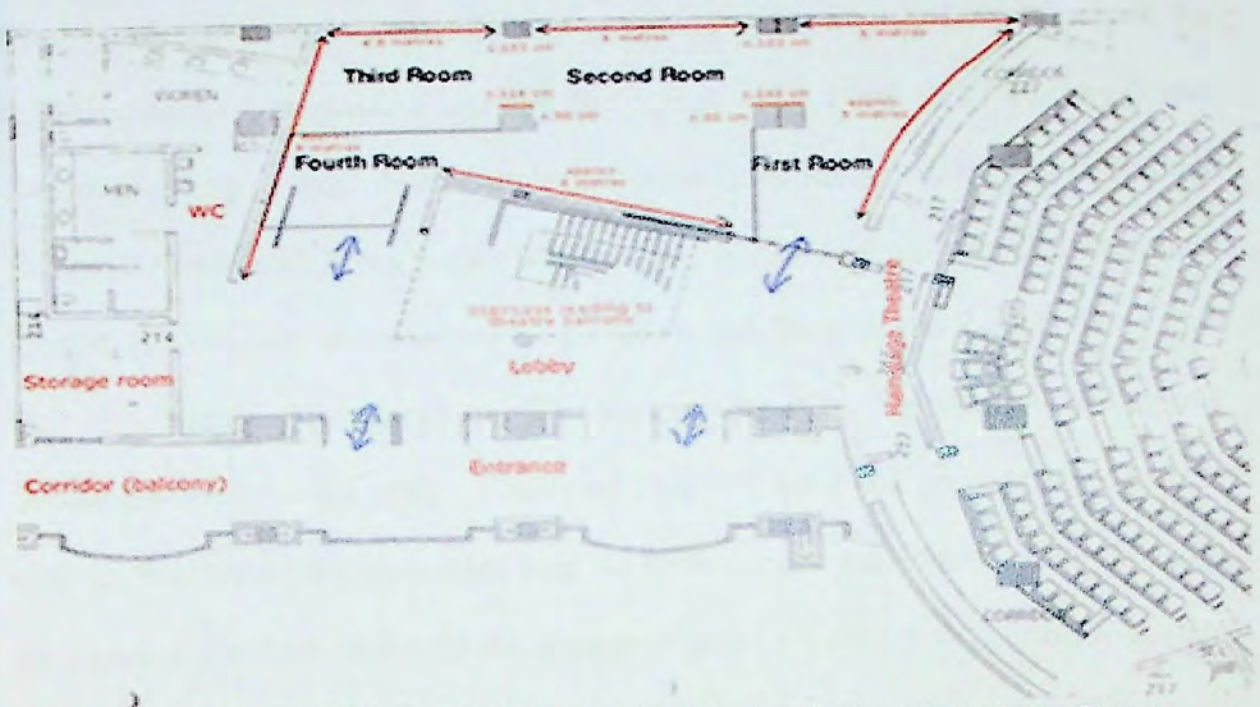

Figure I.1. Floor plan of the Falaki Gallery at the American University in Cairo, Egypt.

The enchanting voice of the *Radoud* (chanter/bard) alongside the rhythmic beats of the music and chest beating *(latm)* drew members of the audience from the main hall into the first room. Many members of the audience were moved by the majestic, heartrending and powerful voice of the *Radoud;* Jalaa' Abdelwahab (a friend who conceptually and artistically provided support throughout the process of constructing the exhibit) commented on his experiences:

> It was a metaphysical experience allowing one to observe the connection between the historic and religious events of '*Ashura* and their current daily manifestations in life and rituals. The senses are stimulated by the sounds, sites and smells which help bring the entire journey to life. One of the most powerful aspects was the spiritual, strong, and defiant voice of the singer mourning (...) with melodic rhythm that carried throughout the exhibition ensuring a continuum between the different halls.[53]

According to several audience members, the smoldering incense aroma and dimmed lighting attracted them into the first room. Tapping into the audiences senses served to set the mood, pace, rhythm and transformed them into participants in the journey through the space. As the participants walked in the first room, they encountered

five black tombs placed on the ground which served to guide their movement and assist them in maneuvering in between these spaces (See Figure I.2. First Room on the following page). A projected image of a photograph which I took in 2004 of my female cousins standing in front of an installation constructed during *Muharram* in Karbala covered the back wall. Along the left wall, hanging narratives of the main characters (i.e.: Zaynab, Husayn, etc) elucidate the events which took place in the Karbala battle (See Figure I.3. Hanging Narratives in the First Room on the following page). As participants entered the second room, they encountered Husayn's solid and grave black shrine. In contrast, four black silhouettes hang from the ceiling across each corner of the shrine. In the corner of the room, green ribbons were provided in a bowl for participants to acquire in order to tie them around the shrine in a manner close to what occurs inside the original shrines in Karbala (See Figure I.4. Second Room on the following page). In the third room, the participants were required to maneuver in between six, large photographs dangling from the ceiling (which I took during my visit to Karbala during *Muharram* in 2004). In the back of the third room, against the back wall a large coffin shaped framed photograph reigns (See Figure I.5. Third Room on the following page). The fourth room and final room was the *nadhr* (Pledge and Offering) room. This is the smallest room and more private of the four. Candle lights illuminated an elaborate structure, while scents of the incense offered a hazy effect. The structure was decorated with various offerings such as flowers, spices, herbs, seeds and food. On top of the structure, a green, silver and gold mirror was suspended from the ceiling (See Figure I.6. Fourth Room on the following page).

Figure I.2. First Room.

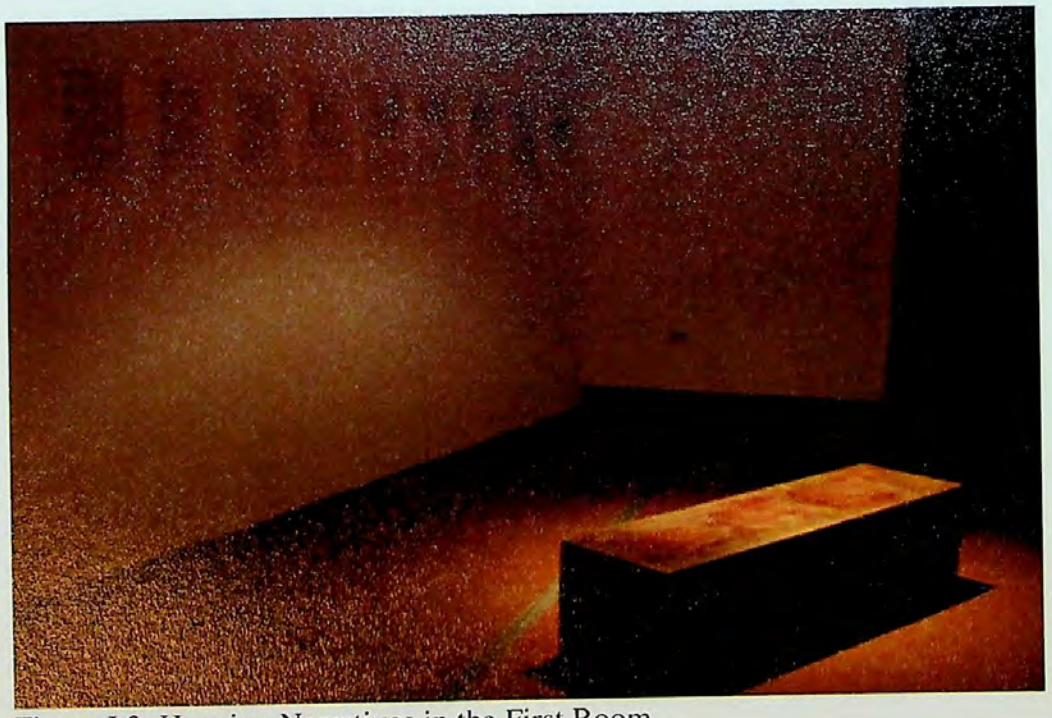

Figure I.3. Hanging Narratives in the First Room.

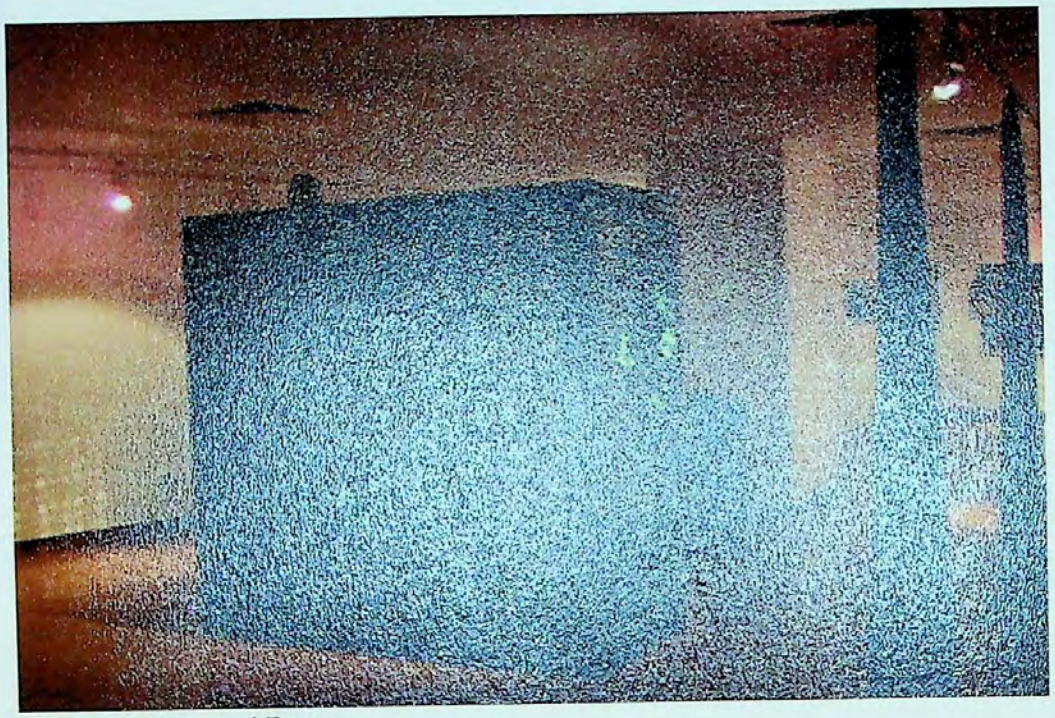

Figure I.4. Second Room.

Figure I.5. Third Room.

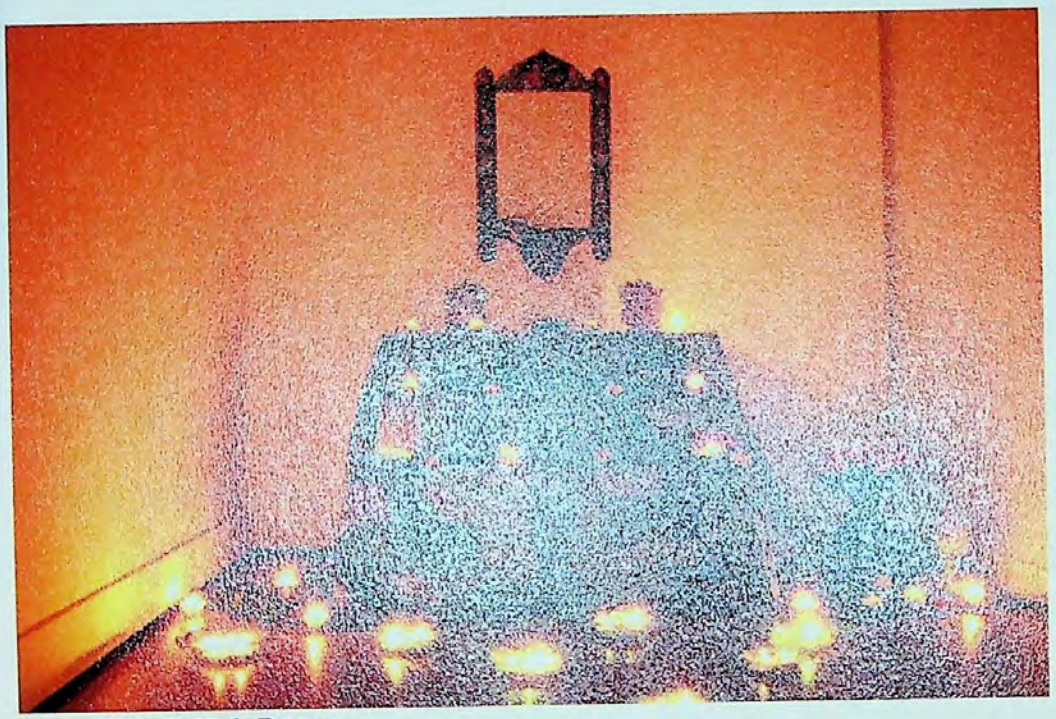

Figure I.6. Fourth Room.

Jalaa' Abdelwahab provides a detailed description of his encounters with the art installation:

> [In the first room] the aesthetic details (…) on the coffins (…) incorporating images and color were distinguished and beautiful. They helped the audience to imagine the events of the day, the drama, the pain that occurred which were described poetically in the introduction panels of the exhibition. The middle room [consisting] of the tomb is more like the heart of the exhibition from which history and events radiate. The motion in that room is heavy, black and still. It is spacious and crowded, loud and quiet at the same time. The arrows are painful to look at but confirm the vital and central role of this room. The coffins [in the first room] were leading to this room, but in reality the coffins would come from that room, it all made sense that way. If that room was on the peripheral it would feel less important and had less of an impact. The next room (…) [consisting of the] photo exhibition, makes you feel like you are looking through windows from a different period of time, the way the pictures were hung from the ceiling allows the fluidity in motion and makes the events more lively. The wall photos are more crowded and condensed, giving a more cross section of a day, or of the day.[54]

In this chapter, I will metaphorically walk you through the first room while describing the making and significance of the various material objects. I will also provide a reading of ritual practices such as the female *Qirayeh* and *'Ashura* commemorations which I attended in 2004 in Baghdad and Karbala, Iraq. In addition, I will share the stories of

participants during these ceremonies. Furthermore, I will shed light on the 1991 Karbala uprising and its repercussions on the shrines, city and community (including family members).

Contextualizing the Exhibit: Journey through the Senses

As you enter this room, I aim to transport you into a sacred realm. In order to do so, all your senses must be evoked so one may experience a glimpse of the layers of meaning, and grasp the nature of the history I attempt to reconstruct.

The narrative of Karbala and *'Ashura* cannot be told through a merely intellectual analysis; I, therefore, attempt to divert the audience from an intellectual process, and revert to a holistic, experiential method by saturating the audience's senses through smells, sounds and sight. A precise description of the narrative of Karbala and *'Ashura* would not fully capture the experience, and how I used it to weave multiple narratives and experiences together; hence, if this project was only an intellectual endeavor and not an experiential one, I would have just written about it. The multiple narratives engage in a realm beyond the intellect and tap into the sacred by engaging the senses to induce emotional and cathartic performative expressions in order to move the participants to a spiritual and transcendental space. This project aims to keep the memory and history alive through narratives, visual and performative methods. It also charges the participants with a sense of the collective which forms solidarity among *'Ashura* participants. The narratives provide a paradigm and instill values which equip participants with the tools to tackle challenges and struggle for their cause. Since the aim of this project is to re-conceptualize the meaning of the sacred and expand the notion of ritual, I engage in a

realm that is beyond an intellectual process. Hence, the sacred is manifested through the exhibit space, while the ritual is transformed into the creative practice of making the installation.

The intention behind this project is not to dismiss the academic process; rather it is to expand our understanding to include notions of the sacred. Hence, I make use of both a Shi'a informed mode of ritualized narratives and performances as well as feminist methods of retelling to create a space for a holistic (including spiritual or scared, not just functional, in reference to how academic discourses including feminist projects deal with the subject matter) approach to understanding memory, trauma and healing. The sacred does not only refer to religion or religious practices; rather it is the engagement with our senses that are representations of emotional, expressive and spiritual activities. My attempt at reconstructing multiple narratives and experiences—my own, different family members and Iraqis participating in *'Ashura* commemorations— through the experiential process of walking through the pilgrimage setting of the installation— is not simply about my own understanding or interpretation of the narratives and experiences. Rather, all my experiences and encounters with multiple spaces, communities and family members have shaped and informed my approach and processes for tackling this project.

The entire Shi'ite narrative is based on constructing images of Husayn's martyrdom by arousing the emotions of the ritual participants through sensory experiences to lead them toward catharsis, lamentation, and action. It relies on an emotional and physical[55] experiential process. By emotionally evoking the past, the ritual participants are transported back in time, and are forced to relive it in the present. The experience of *'Ashura*, Karbala and the Shi'ite narrative demands a full sensory

experience; therefore I attempt to reconstruct it in my work. Through stirring up the audience's senses, I attempt to tap into different realms that are invisible. Since the unseen can be emotional, spiritual, and religious, it must be experienced through evoking aesthetics, sounds, and smells. Alan Morinis suggests that:

> The recent dominance of symbolic analysis in the anthropological study of religion has obscured the importance of direct, sensory, non-intellectual experience in socio-cultural life. The majority of participants in ritual and pilgrimage do not pay nearly as much attention to symbols and meaning as do anthropologists. Their concerns lean to practical effect and direct experiences…An important task before anthropologists is to investigate in greater depth the experiential correlates of ritual participation …Understanding of pilgrims and their pilgrimage, however, demands that social perspectives be supplemented by an appreciation for the direct experiences had by pilgrims. Structure and experience are inseparable components of the institution and process of sacred journeying.[56]

Victor Turner, a renowned anthropologist who has put forth the most significant theory on pilgrimage and ritual, also stresses the importance of investigating the relation of structure and experience in the study of pilgrimage. Alan Morinis moves forward Turner's theory:

> pilgrimage as a performance stands as the anti-structural counterpart to the structured organization of society, with its rigid roles and statuses. Pilgrimage, in its essence, is an opportunity for the expression of "communitas"[57] experience: the "direct, immediate, and total confrontation of human identities" (1969:131), breaching the bonds of structure. (…)Though "communitas" has not been found to be a universal aspect of pilgrimages, Turner has pointed to a crucial fact of pilgrimage that contemporary anthropological theory is not well equipped to handle-the realm of individual experience. "Communitas" may not be the pilgrimage experience, but Turner has pointed to the fact that experience itself is of central concern to pilgrims.[58]

Hence, I too attempt to move forward the individuals' experience by tapping into their senses. Samer El Karanshawy explains that the "performance nature of ritual allows for it to be composed of what Singer called in the case of India "cultural media": a mode of communication which not only includes spoken language, but also non-linguistic media such as music, dancing, acting as well as graphic and plastic art, which all together communicate the diverging content of Indian culture."[59] Victor Turner devoted much of his work to concepts of liminal space, pilgrimage, and ritual. He states that:

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> Levi Strauss and others have used the term sensory codes for the enlistment of each of the senses to develop a vocabulary and grammar founded on it to produce "messages"-for instance different types of incense burned at different times in a performance communicate different meaning, gestures and facial expressions are assigned meanings with reference to emotions and ideas to be communicated, [for example] soft and loud sound have conventional meanings, etc. Thus certain sensory codes are associated with each medium. The master of ceremonies, priest, producer or director creates art from the ensemble of media and codes just as the conductor in the single genre of classical music blends and opposes the sounds of the different instruments to produce an often-unrepeatable effect.[60]

Hence, sandalwood[61] incense fumes escort you along a journey, drawing one closer to the sacred and the invisible. The sandalwood incense is subsumed into other smells such as herbs, flowers, spices, and other types of fumes. The dimmed light and hazy clouds produced by incense suggest the theme of the visible and invisible, providing the audience with a glimpse of the spiritual, sacred, and aesthetic flight.

The profound and melodic tribute of Bassem Al-Karbalai (eulogies chanter and bard), commemorating the suffering of the Prophet's family and of Zaynab— that eulogize *Imam* Husayn— set the mood for the simulated pilgrimage in the installation. Al-Karbalai's dramatized use of lamentation poetry *(Marathi)* and eulogies—both in classical Arabic and colloquial Iraqi— are not merely historical accounts of the narrative of Karbala in 680 A.D., and commemorations of the suffering of *ahl-al-bayt.* They are oral traditions that are linked to a rich history of a textually based genre of Arabic poetry. The use of emotionally charged eulogies *(marathi)* in the Shi'ite tradition is an attempt to transport the listeners/believers/faithful into a rich sensory realm of collapsed time and space—the meta-historical/physical/narrative of Karbala and *'Ashura*, and of the battle that took place during *'Ashura* in Karbala. Al-Karbalai's highly charged, expressive, and evocative mental images construct a narrative of the events that took place there, which led to *Imam* Husayn's martyrdom. Hence, Al-Karbalai enjoins the listeners to relive the experience of Karbala, and the tragic death of *Imam* Husayn.

The listeners are thrown into a liminal experience, where they inhabit the present and the past, at the same moment. Mahmoud Ayoub expressively demonstrates how participants experience this unification of time:

> Through ritual, religious men and women can relive an event in their spiritual history and renew their relationship with it. Through the enactment of an important event of the past, the 'now' of a religious community may be extended back into the past and forward into the future. Thus, history is no longer the mere flow of happenings in time without purpose or direction. Rather, through the present moment, that is, the ritualistic moment, time and space become unified and events move toward a definite goal. In the ritualistic moment, serial tie becomes the bridge connecting primordial time and its special history with the timeless eternity of the future. This eternal fulfillment of time becomes the goal of human time and history.[62]

The goal of the lamentations is to keep the memory alive by reviving the pain, suffering, and sacrifice of the *Imam* and *ahl-al-bayt*. The cathartic impact of the ritual works through the powerful emotions it creates. The *Radoud* (chanter/bard) can also lead the listeners into an elaborate imaginary, creative, and aesthetic journey through narrating the past—by fluctuating between time and place—wherein different historical characters are brought into the narrative of Karbala from various historical moments, all at once. In each story the *Radoud* aims to directly associate characters (like Mariam, Daoud, and Adam, personalities who clearly had nothing to do with *'Ashura*) to the Karbala narrative. The characters can also be in dialogue with each other, even though they span through different historical moments:

> It totally engages the participation of the audience and it has extraordinary dynamic flexibility. There are no barriers of time and space. For instance, Napoleon Bonaparte can appear on the stage along with Hussein, the Virgin Mary, Alexander the Great, and the Queen of Sheba. The text is not fixed; episodes form one play can be interpolated in another to suit the mood of the actors, the audience and the weather.[63]

Samuel R. Peterson asserts similar notions:

> The compassion the woeful tale of Imam Hussein's martyrdom evokes from [Prophet] Yusef and his father [Prophet] Yaqub, a message which the latter sums up at the end of the drama by saying, 'O, may a thousand sons like me and my Yusef be a ransom for Hussein! May a thousand Yusefs be the dust of his feet.... Come, O Gabriel! Show me the plain of Kerbala, for the sake of God.' The subject of another prelude is the wedding of King Sulaiman and Balqis. While lamenting in the play the fate of the Kerbala martyrs

> which his vision of all events past and present enable him to see, Sulaiman interrupts his own marriage to introduce the celebrations for the marriage of Hussein's nephew Qasem to his daughter Fatemeh: but these end with a dirge for the groom when he returns from battle mortally wounded.[64]

The oral tradition (drawing from text-based genera of Arabic poetry) of historicizing through lamentation rituals draws lessons from the past by merging it with the present, and by emotionally engaging the listener in the account. The meta-narrative revolves around the story of Husayn, Karbala, and *'Ashura*. The binary oppositions of the oppressed and oppressor, justice and injustice, resistance and fighting for the cause, are also evoked. The line between 'classical' readings of the narrative, which would claim authority on the basis of a text, and the practice of the believers, is often blurred. Instead of a uniform reading, interpretation, or standard ritual practices, one sees numerous "(...) social, spiritual, salvational, ethical, aesthetic, and political roles in which the community reflects itself, reasserts its group solidarity and collective memory and mirrors its reality and the tensions it encounters (...)."[65] Through the images, symbols, and rituals, one sees *'Ashura's* eternal significance as an expression of the perpetual conflict between oppressed and oppressor, as an epic of hope and revolution, which may be employed against injustices people undergo in various parts of the world.[66]

Ritual Practices and Sacred Spaces as Sites of Resistance

In the next three sections I will highlight several ritual practices (*Qirayeh* ceremonies and *'Ashura* commemorations) as they relate to the participants' lives. I will also shed light on how sacred spaces (Karbala and the shrines) and these rituals have played a central role in defining the community. In addition, I will demonstrate that these

rituals and spaces have been utilized by the community as sites of recovery and resistance, both under the former Iraqi regime and the current U.S. occupation.

Attending the Qirayeh Ritual

The *Qirayeh* (mourning gatherings that eulogize *ahl-al-bayt*) are assemblies of condolence sermons performed by a *Mullayah*[67] in commemoration of Husayn. The *Mullayah* chants lamentations, recitations of the narratives and leads chest beating. The women actively participate in a 'call and response' process by chanting back, weeping and chest beating. At the climax of the ritual some of the women move to the middle of the room stepping into a circle and moving rhythmically to the chanting, while loudly responding back, beating their chests and heads.

I accompanied my maternal aunt to a female-only *Qirayeh* that took place at her friend's home in Baghdad. The *Qirayeh* lasted for about three hours. The *Mullayah* led the recitation and chanting in the middle of the room, while the female attendees seated on the floor around the room recited and chanted back. The recitations consisted of the narrative of Karbala, including the battle itself, the events that preceded and followed it. The *Mullayah* usually draws lessons from the lives and deeds of Husayn, Zaynab, Fatemeh and others from the House of the Prophet who suffered for the cause of Islam. On that day, the *Mullayah* narrated the stories of the massacres integrating the historical narrative of Husayn into the present political situation of Iraq. During her speech, the *Mullayah* pointed to the injustices inflected upon the House of the Prophet throughout the Karbala tragedy, while intermittently she inserted comparison references to the oppression Iraqis have been undergoing throughout contemporary day Iraq. The *Mullayah* compared the innocent Iraqi victims who have been oppressed by a tyrant

dictator and who have suffered as a result of the invasion to the martyred Husayn and his followers, asserting that they are martyrs and will be delivered to salvation.

As the *Mullayah* moved the women to an intense passionate height, some of them merged into the middle of the room forming a circle, while moving in accelerated rhythmic motions to the chanting, reciting, and chest beating to the point of a trance. At the height of the ritual, the lights were turned off for a few minutes to highlight the transcendental space. As the *Mullayah* swiftly ended the ritual, abruptly the lights were turned back on. The women went back to their seats and within a few minutes the conversing, laughing, and chatting began. Some of the women who were highly affected by the frenzy were consoled by others in the group and taken back to their seats. The *sufra* (meal) was brought out and placed in the middle of the room, on the floor. The women gathered around the *sufra* and continued to socialize for the next hour, then slowly they began to leave one by one.

From dialogues with several female attendees, I gathered that over the last few decades, the Iraqi nation-state's totalitarian "nationalist and secularization" projects attempted to separate religion from state. Faleh A. Jabar sheds light on this project and its encroachment on cultural and religious affiliations[68]:

> Four major areas of conflict developed under the Ba'th. First, the secularization drive by the sate was mainly directed at the autonomous Shi'ite religious establishment. Second, the totalitarian Ba'th state reproduced the ethnic, religious and communal disequilibrium in terms of political representation and participation and the uneven distribution and allocation of economic benefits. Third was the ideo-cultural clash between the *etatiste* [status modes of production], pan-Arab, social-nationalist ideology of the ruling Ba'th and the universalist or particularist Islamic discourse developed by Shi'ite Islamic groups in the manner of the Da'wa [Islamic political party] model. The fourth area was regional politics, that is, relations between Iraq and Iran which – except for a brief interval of cooperation (1975-88) – were tense, and led eventually to a protracted eight-year war. Totalitarian pressures, secularization, coerced Ba'thization, the command economy and other factors hit various lower, middle and upper Shi'ite classes, lay groups and clerics alike. [69]

At different moments the state changed its policy and used religious slogans as a means to appease believers and bring them into its fold. For example, during the first Gulf War, the text *Allah Akbar* (God is Great) was added to the Iraqi flag. Supplementing the Iraqi flag with a Muslim slogan symbolically transformed the public image of the Iraqi state from an Arab Nationalist to a Muslim one. Family members claimed that the slogan change was carried out by the Ba'th regime during the Gulf War in order to rally support from a larger constituency (Muslims instead of only Arabs) around the world. Another example was provided by my mother: after the 1991 rebellions which resulted in the brutal massacres of hundred of Iraqi civilians in Karbala (for a detailed account refer to page 59, section titled '1991 Karbala Uprising and its Aftermath'), the state attempted to appease its Shi'a masses through Saddam Husayn's visit to Karbala, where he prayed inside Husayn's shrine as a symbolic gesture of respect and reverence for the *Imam* and Shi'a sacred places. In the 1980s, Saddam Husayn gave a public speech where he asserted that his lineage actually descended from *Imam* Hassan (the second Shi'ite *Imam* and Husayn's brother). Several family members sarcastically mocked Saddam Husayn's claims and gestures while dismissing them. Jabar elaborates on Saddam Husayn's attempts to appease the Shi'a masses after several mass uprisings and consequent military quelling:

> Hussein attempted to subsume religion and religious symbols under state control. In addition to extending funds to the holy shrines, he made various visits to Najaf and Karbala in May 1977, and claimed noble decent. His maternal uncle Khairullah Tilfh manufactured a noble lineage for al-Baker. [Ahmed Hasssn Al-Baker was the Iraqi president from 1968-79 during which Saddam Hussein served as Vice President, they were cousins.] Years later, a similar a similar attempt produced a family tree linking Husayn to the same noble ancestry.(...)
> Despite the general secular line adopted by the Ba'th party it nevertheless began, pragmatically, to employ religious symbols in general and Shi'ite symbols in particular. The birthday of Imam Ali ibn Talib was declared a national holiday. Hussein began to make further trips to the holy shrines, which became permanent items on his agenda. (...)

> The improvement in Shi'ite representation was counterbalanced with new acts making double affiliation [belonging to the Ba'th and another party at the same time] and punishable by death (...).[70]

State practices, *Qirayeh* attendees argued, continued to suppress and marginalize their beliefs, values, and ways of life. Successive regimes dismissed 'As*hura* as an intrinsic part of their Iraqi Shi'a character and identity. As a result, these Iraqi Shi'a women responded by placing their own strength and power in their participation in '*Ashura,* especially through the ritual of *Qirayeh.* In so doing, these women reasserted their Iraqi Shi'a identity, while simultaneously transforming the space and the ritual into a defiant practice against the state, often taking place in the secrecy of their own homes as they feared punishment by the government. At various moments, the Ba'th regime attempted to crack down on such Shi'a rituals through numerous methods. Jabar provides examples of control measures taken by the Ba'th command by the end of the 70s:

> According to Da'wa sources, restrictions participation in Shi'ite rituals were imposed by the general directorate of the security service, including a prohibition on the collection of contributions for rituals. If not instructed to so, Ba'th members and civil servants were not permitted to take part in the pilgrimage; they were also denied leave on these occasions. Party and administrative apparatuses were instructed to educate citizens and advise them to distance themselves from such practices, and instill into them patriotic and nationalist principles.[71]

Today, these women openly commemorate '*Ashura* in their homes. At one of the *Qirayeh*'s I attended in 2004 in Baghdad, I witnessed a female *Mullayah* leading these ceremonies; she narrated the stories of the Karbala battle and integrated the historical narrative of *Al-Husayn* into a discussion of the present tumultuous political situation in Iraq (refer to page 54-55 for more details).

Now, after the U.S. invasion, Iraqi Shi'a women are once again revolutionizing '*Ashura* rituals, weaving the narratives of the battle of Karbala and its themes of oppression and justice into their critique of U.S. occupation. For example, during '*Ashura*

in 2004, I witnessed mass marches during the processions of *'Ashura* where women and men carried banners and shouted slogans against the U.S. occupation, Saddam Husayn and others they perceived as oppressors. My Aunt, *Um* 'Ali— who is a retired school teacher, and a mother of three—spoke of *Qirayeh's* religious and popular cultural spaces as the only outlet she and many other women have to express their grief, sorrow, and dissatisfaction with the status quo. She stated that these are the only spaces for women to come together as a community, away from their daily lives, chores, and men. She asserted that one needs to look at these spaces not only as a women's communal space, but as a forum for expression, creativity and healing where women manifest their emotions and transcend their daily lives as mothers, sisters, wives within a female community.

Most of the women I interviewed thought it was extremely timely and relevant for them to share their experiences "freely" since they had not been able to do so under Saddam Husayn's regime. Many, if not all, of the interviewee's spoke of debilitating economic, political and social hardships, beginning with the rise of the Ba'th party, and continuing throughout Saddam's brutal rule. They also discussed the difficult years of U.S-led sanctions, the numerous wars (Iraq-Iran, the First and Second Gulf war), the U.S. invasion, and the continuous and violent civil unrest. Most of the women lost husbands, sons, brothers and fathers throughout these periods. For example, *Um* Kathem (my aunt) lost two of her sons due to the executions led by Saddam Husayn through the early 1980s against perceived threat by Shi'a populations (I will elaborate on her story later in the chapters). In general, men continue to lose their lives to such atrocious circumstances, while women are left behind to mourn their losses and suffer the consequences as they

become the head of the household, take care of their families, children, as well as join the workforce (if they had not already done so before their husband's death). Another example of how such experiences are manifested differently among men and women is; when my uncle (Mehsin) was severely wounded by shrapnel during the Iraq-Iran war, he was dragged from the battlefield by a fellow soldier to a hospital in Basra. My aunt (*Um* Ali) found his charred blackened corpse rotting on the hospital bed. She was forced to leave her work, home and family and drive from Baghdad to Basra (which during the war was a very risky endeavor) and nurse him until he recovered.

According to my interviewees, throughout the Ba'th's history, Shi'ites were marginalized, deported, executed, and placed under surveillance. At the same time, the destruction of Shi'ite cultural-religious spaces and rituals and an increase in repression directed Shi'ites to revolutionary mass mobilizations through '*Ashura* rituals. After the 1991 uprising and its aftermath, Saddam began to co-opt the Karbala narrative and Husayn's martyrdom in the hopes of winning the Shi'ites into his fold.

1991 Karbala Uprising and its Aftermath

The city and bazaars of Karbala were built around the elaborate tombs of *Imam* Husayn's and Abbas's holy shrines. Upon her return to the U.S. from Karbala in 1994, *Um* Mohammed (my mother) presented photographs, which she took, that depicted the bleak and desolate consequences of the destruction of the city square and shrine sites inflicted by the army as a result of the rebellions that took place in Karbala, after the first Gulf war and during *Muharram* 1991. After witnessing the aftermath of the demolitions by the Iraqi army upon the city square of Karbala, she asserted that the Ba'th government

set out on a campaign to reconstruct the cityscape of Karbala. She affirmed that the operation resulted in the desolation of the area between the two shrines to make room for an open square. The drive behind the reassembling of the old space into an open city square was an attempt by the Ba'th government to transform the space into a sight of surveillance and control. The old city with its constricted and unregimented architecture was a space in which rebels could hide. *Um* Mohammed recalls how one had to walk through the old city and bazaars narrow maze-like allies to get from Husayn's shrine to Abbas's. She reminisces over her parent's old home which was one of the homes demolished during this destructive process. She recalls one of the largest Shi'ite rebellions which took place against Saddam Husayn's regime in the south, in the cities of Najaf, Karbala, Diwaniya, Nassriya, Amara, Basra, Hillah, and Kut,[72] after President Bush had encouraged the Iraqi people, especially the Shi'ites and Kurds, and had reassured them that the United States stood ready to help them: "there's another way for the bloodshed to stop," "and that is for the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside."[73]

The U.S. administration manipulated the Shi'ite population both in the 1990s and in the 2003 invasion through propaganda campaigns against Saddam Husayn and in supposed support of the Shi'ite population. In 1991, the U.S. abandoned the rebels after their short lived victory by allowing Saddam Husayn to suppress the rebellions. Even though the no-fly zone was implemented throughout the 1990s, Saddam Husayn was allowed in 1991 to trespass and bomb the rebels and the city. According to community members, it was evident to them that the U.S administration, at that time, preferred having Saddam Husayn in power over a Shi'ite coup. Since then, the U.S. government

has been planning its invasion of Iraq and the removal of Saddam Husayn from power. In 2003, after securing the role of the new governing body in Iraq, the U.S. once again manipulated the Shi'ite population in its attempt to invade Iraq. In fact, most of my interviewees asserted that they were aware of being manipulated by the U.S. administration to gain access to Iraq's material resources which they sought. However they did not expect the invasion to turn into a full new-colonial occupation.

Lubna and Luma (my cousins) are both school teachers at the local high school in Karbala. They recall the 1991 uprisings during *'Ashura* and the way the Iraqi military responded. They recollect the outcome of the uprisings which resulted in the massacres of hundreds of rebels. They remember when rebels gathered in the city center of Karbala, seized all symbols of power and declared it a liberated zone. The rebels using *'Ashura* as a pretext for their uprising, utilized Shi'ite slogans, symbols, images and narratives to declare their victory over Saddam Husayn's regime. Lubna and Luma assert that in March of the same year, Iraqi troops loyal to Saddam surrounded the city and began shelling Shi'ite rebels and community members who had taken refuge in the shrines. Years later, I saw raw footage taken inside the shrine packed by elders and wailing women carrying their children in front of the camera demonstrating that they are innocent victims. In the same footage, I remember seeing the rebels firing from atop the shrines while the army was encroaching into the city square. Later in the footage, I saw the emptied shelled shrine smeared in blood while corpses covered the surrounding area.

The Iraqi military's shelling of the city seemed to have two functions: to quell the rebellion and to reconstruct the city square. The government decided to raze much of Karbala and rebuild it. The army redeveloped the city center by building main roads from

the outskirts of the city into the heart of the shrines. The army then continued leveling the old city with artillery and tank fire for approximately five hundred yards in every direction around the holy shrines. They effectively opened and widened the city center by building a large square around the two shrines. Fearing for their lives, Lubna and Luma hardly left their home throughout this period. They narrate these events based on the eyewitness accounts of their father who recounted what he had seen upon his return to Karbala after the shelling had ended. As *Abu* Sarhad (their father) was walking back into the city on his way home, he had to maneuver his way through dead bodies. This brutality aimed to instill fear in the remaining population and also humiliate the dead and the living. He swore that the military refused to remove the bodies and prevented anyone from doing so. They recollect how he walked through the city in surprise and bewilderment; he could not recognize the city center and was attempting to reorient himself to the new landscape.

Even though by 1992 most of the damage to the shrines had already been repaired, the bazaars around them had not been rebuilt. The reconstruction project, aimed at widening and developing the area around the holy shrines, was an attempt to transform much of the Persian style architecture and bazaars of Karbala to make it easier for the army to maneuver and crack down on rebels. The narrow alleyways around the holy shrines were transformed into a large square, with approximately six roads extending from the square to the main entrances of the city, giving the army easy access to this significant location. The city center and square became a location for control and surveillance by the government, military, and police to suppress any rebellion that could be instigated through *'Ashura. Um* Mohammed remembers the shrines, which were once

elaborate constructions topped with golden domes, and cannot be now restored to their old form. She asserts that the gold strips have been removed and replaced with counterfeit metal. *Um* Mohammed and other interviewees recall the old Persian turquoise tiles that surrounded the walls of the shrines which have been demolished and replaced with yellow brick walls. They remember the posters and murals of Saddam Husayn which decorated the square and assembly areas that paradoxically claimed alliance and lineage to *Imam* Husayn. Interviewees assert that new administrators, personnel, and guards who were loyal to the Ba'th regime, were assigned posts to keep security in check. Interviewees assert that tanks were stationed at all corners of the shrines and entrance ways to keep any disturbances in check.

One realizes how the Iraqi state, the U.S. government and Shi'ite communities have used the city, the assembly square, and the shrines as a space to redefine the scope, nature, and magnitude of *'Ashura.* As a result of such horrendous inflictions orchestrated by the Iraqi state and the U.S. government upon the Iraqi peoples, it is women who have had to carry the brunt of mourning the loss of their sons, husbands and fathers while mending their sick and wounded and having at the same time to labor both at home and outside to provide for the family. For example, *Um* Kathem (my aunt, who I mentioned briefly earlier on) lost two of her sons as a result of Saddam Husayn's executions in the early 1980's (though she did not find out that they were actually executed until after the 2003 invasion, hence, she had been awaiting their return since their disappearance in 1980). Her other two sons fled Iraq when their brothers were taken, and a few years later her husband died from a heart attack (everyone is convinced that he died as a result of loosing his four sons), whereas and the majority of her family members (including her

mother, father, brothers and sisters) were deported from Iraq. She remained strong while grieving her losses and kept providing for her four daughters throughout, even though the family had been discriminated against. After the 2003 invasion and upon finding out that her two sons were executed in the early 1980's, she publicly held a mourning ceremony for them. My father and her two other sons also held a public ceremony in Oakland, California for them at a local Islamic cultural center where they also gave public speeches about the situation in Iraq and invited other members from the Iraqi community (including Kurds and Sunnis) to speak. They showed a film about Iraq and turned the event into a public awareness event by inviting the local media to come, interview and film people. Even though a part of the story made it to the public realm, my aunt's twenty seven years of grieving and loss did not make it to the public realm. Hence, I insert a part of her story as a tribute to her and my cousins and to all the women who have had to carry the burdens while remaining strong and defiant.

My Return to Karbala in 2004: Reclaiming and Reconstructing Community and Identity

Ironically, *this* same location of the square and city center proved to be advantageous for the approximately three million pilgrims and locals who commemorated '*Ashura* in 2004, after the second Gulf War. Yet, this time, the city was under American control, with the American and Polish armies in charge of surveillance. However, this time, the city elite, officials, religious leaders, and other local organizing bodies forced the American and Polish troops to leave the city center and square during the commemoration of '*Ashura*. They pushed them to the outskirts of the city center and reasserted their power by constructing their own security mechanisms. The city center

and square then became a site for one of the largest and the most critical *'Ashura* in Shi'ite history, marking a turn in its maturity, nature, scale, and magnitude that still needs to be materialized.

The main roads leading to the shrines, city center, and square gave access to the millions of pilgrims who flood the city from different parts of Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bahrain, Lebanon, the U.S. and other countries. These streets bustled with pilgrims, merchants, street vendors, orators, and locals who gathered on this day of *'Ashura* to commemorate the martyrdom of *Imam* Husayn.

In 2004 pilgrims during the processions, assemblies, and the re-enactment of the last day of the Karbala battle, to the surprise of many, marched with the millions protesting the United States occupation of their city and country, carrying slogans and chanting against the United States, Saddam Husayn, Israel, and other perceived oppressors. I interviewed numerous by-standers and participants in these protests as they declared their outrage and spoke about their current plight in relationship to the Shi'ites' historical plight.

The banners carried by protesters were made up of three symbolic colors: red representing the blood of their martyr and the murderous brutality of the Umayyad army; black symbolizing mourning and sorrow as well as alliance and belonging; and green, as the symbol of Islam, Sayyids, and peace, denoting noble lineage, the continuity of this descent and the cause they represent as cherished and kept alive. Accompanying this demonstration is the *Shabih* (consoling imitation)[74] procession, signifying the army of Husayn, "by their flight to the meta-historical realm of Karbala, or by their direct performance of this episode, participants reassert their loyalty to the sacred House of the

Prophet. Through it they reconfirm their communal solidarity, achieve what they believe to be forgiveness for their lapses, and feel morally improved, and gain more confidence in acquiring powerful support for their worldly callings,"[75] against injustice.

The pilgrims, during one of the main *Shabih*[76] processions, ran in a fury while beating their chests simultaneously in rhythmic motion towards a small square, where a full-scale installation of the camps of Yazid Bin Mu'awiya were built. They collectively attacked the camps and set them on fire, culminating in a riotous cacophony signifying the vengeance and victorious celebrations of the Shi'ites against injustice and oppression. Most of the participants in the *Shabih* processions who reenacted the scenes of the battle, and who later rushed to the camp site to set it on fire, were men, though hundreds of women were actively present in the demonstrations and the processions. What I found starkly intriguing was the presence of thousands of women wrapped in their black '*abaya*'s[77] adorning the abandoned beige buildings surrounding the entire place. As I looked around, I saw several multi-level deserted dwellings overflowing with these women draped in black, shadowing the entire spectacle from a distance. This scene brings to mind the themes I tackle which shed light on women's presence and role in these rituals, yet their participation and presence continues to be unmarked and kept marginal from public discourses. Hence, this scene inspired me to recreate this landscape and utilize it as a metaphor in Room Two (detailed in Chapter Two), where I bring into play the black larger then life ethereal hanging silhouettes as symbols of women's dominant yet marginal presence (refer to Chapter Two for a comprehensive examination.)

The old rituals were all brought back to life but took on different forms and meanings which were reconstructed to address the very different political and urban

landscapes. The earlier example of the *Shabih* processions demonstrates how the old ritual was recreated to address the current political reality in Iraq, while using the reconstructed Karbala landscape to their advantage (the wide streets and squares served as an ideal place to hold the million march processions). One of the bystanders declared that all tyrants and oppressions eventually dissipate (referring to Yazid), and in order to overcome the current subjugation, we must follow in the footsteps of our Prince of Martyrs (referring to Husayn). Upon my return to the U.S., I shared with my mother my encounters and reflections on how the rituals have been transformed. *Um* Muhammad, was delighted that she could once again partake in these rituals, previously outlawed during the years of Saddam's rule. She also spoke about the ways these rituals have both kept their traditions yet have also transformed and been brought into the present. She asserted that today one can see new elements brought in, such as video, multi-media and light installations, commemorative religious and election posters, murals and artwork, all speaking of the plight of the Shi'ite history of suffering, and emphasizing redemption through collective solidarity and resistance.

I recall an elder male bystander who commented upon seeing me film the rituals; he enthusiastically explained that it was refreshing to see a woman from the community filming the rituals and narrating the story through 'our' lenses. I was pleasantly surprised since I was reluctant about filming and was hesitant regarding people's acceptance of a young woman who has lived outside Iraq for many years now coming back to construct a visual narrative of the community and events. I interpreted his comment in two ways: his response might be in reaction to the presence of international media crews who were filming the events around the city and his uncertainty about how they might depict and

compose the events. The other might be that he was supportive of the fact that a young woman from the community is using new methods to deliver a message to the rest of the world. Since women, and images of women, are central to the commemoration of *'Ashura* and to my recreation of it, and, at the same time, sometimes marginal to public practice (like silhouettes, their images are visible but not solid), I attempted to tackle a question which I will be elaborate upon in the next Chapter: How do present-day Iraqi women—myself included—work to transform liminality into actual presence?

An Overview of the First Room: Images, Narratives and Interpretations

In this section, I will detail the various encounters with each material object in the first room in an attempt to illuminate the meaning behind the making of the art pieces. I utilize these material objects as portals to shed light upon Shi'ite narratives as they intersect with the experiences of the women I interacted with and my own creative practices.

Earlier in this chapter, I set the mood for the pilgrimage you are metaphorically about to embark upon through demonstrating how I tapped into the audience's senses through the incense scents, and the enchanting voice of the *Radoud*. In the following sections, I will guide you through the first room: as you take your first steps into this voyage, you will be led into a maze, where you will have to navigate among five different tombs. The tombs are made of wood painted in black. Black was used through out the exhibit space to invoke mourning, remembrance and reverence according to Shi'a tradition. I constructed them to look like Islamic tombs that contain a base with two sides. The base faces upwards with the open area facing downward. The tombs differ in size,

with each one being approximately a few inches smaller than the other. I superimposed depictions of the Karbala narratives which I will elaborate on later. This was done for both aesthetic reasons, and to visually signify the variation of the narratives and experiences. My attempt at reconstructing multiple plots and experiences of Shi'ite history is based on keeping the memory alive by commemorating the dead and reviving the past through rituals: art, emotions, and the realm of the spiritual. Hence, viewers may perceive each tomb as a memory box, enveloping memories, narratives, and reflections. Though, these tombs transcend the memories and narratives of martyrs and saints, who become archetypes that have sacrificed themselves for a sacred cause. I constructed five tombs to signify both the five *Ma'soomeen*[78] in Shi'ite Islam—Muhammed, Fatemeh al-Zahra, 'Ali, Hassan, and Husayn—and also the members of my immediate family. Muhammed is the Prophet, 'Ali is his cousin, son-in law, the primary child to become a Muslim and the first *Imam* for the Shi'ites. Husayn is the third Shi'ite *Imam*, and the son of `Ali and Fatemeh al-Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet and the matriarch of Islam. Hassan is the second Shi'ite *Imam* and Husayn's brother.

Finally, I will utilize the projected photograph on the back wall to shed light on women's roles in the Karbala narratives and as transmitters of history. I will also highlight Zaynab's contribution to defining these accounts and histories.

The First Tomb: Depictions of Karbala

The first tomb the audience encounters depicts three scenes from the Karbala battle. I found these images in publications such as *Honar va Mardom* (Art and People)[79] which I found in *Souq El 'Ataba* in Downtown, Cairo. The images portray battles from

the Qajari Period, though I believe they can resemble some of the images that depict the Battle of Karbala. The first image is of two parties in battle, the second one is a closer encounter between the conflicting factions, and the third is of an old man holding a young wounded man in his arms after the battle (See Figure I.7. Depictions of the Karbala Battle).

Figure I.7. Depictions of the Karbala Battle.

One may perceive the martyred man as Ali Al-Akbar held by his father Husayn. A glimpse into a "Tale of Hussain's Martyrdom" by Dr. Mohammad Bahr Al-Uloom—who is a reputable Shi'ite clergyman—may shed light on the narrative of Karbala. In his introduction, Dr. Bahr Al-Uloom indicates the centrality of keeping the memory of Husayn alive through narratives in order to find and obtain salvation: "after all this, my only hope is that all of us may have contributed, each in his own humble effort, to keeping the memory of *Imam* Hussein, the lord of martyrs so that the people of *Kisa* (mantle): Mohammad, Ali, Fatima, Hassan, and Hussein be our intercessors on the day of reckoning, when neither wealth nor offspring would avail. Allah, the Most High is the only Bestower of success."[80] Dr. Bahr Al-Uloom narrates the death of Ali Al-Akbar, whom I have illustrated in the image on the tomb in my installation:

> On the brink of dying, he could muster a shout, "O Aba Abdillah! Farewell. Here is my grandfather; from whose cup I have drunk. Never again I will be thirsty. He says that there will be a cup waiting for you." Hussain hurried to him bending on him, putting his cheek over Ali's and murmuring, "Life is no longer worth living after your departure. How dare they encroach on Allah and violate the sanctity of the Prophet. Alas! It is hard on your grandfather and your father that you call on them for help which they cannot provide. He then scooped a handful of his pure blood and threw [sic.] it to the sky; not a single drop fell to the ground! That is why in the visitation ceremony we used to address him, "May my parents be sacrificed for you as you were wrongfully slain; for your blood

> which ascended to the heavens, for your sacrifice before your father in anticipation of God's reward. Yet he parted with you in extreme heart rending situation when he threw your blood to the sky as an offering and none of it fell to the ground. Hussain ordered his youth to carry his body to the tent, where the free females of the household of the Apostle of God gathered around him crying, wailing beating their breasts, and plucking their hair. Zainab al-Kubra [Senior], the pick of Bani Hashim threw herself on his body cuddling it for she saw in his demise her waning strength, the departure of the protector of her privacy and honour, and the crumbling of the buttress of her house.[81]

I superimposed images depicting what these passages convey on top of the black tomb. I then began layering acid powder paint around the images, I chose acid powder paint so that I could blow on the powder, and create a thin layer in order to both reveal and conceal the images. I chose this method for technical reasons: I did not want the images to be conveyed with ultimate clarity since they are not of the actual Karbala battle as previously noted. Representations of the Karbala battle are open for interpretation since they are reconstructions. Hence, I wanted to depict the images with an ambiguous aura. The depictions seem to be from the Qajar period; however, the resemblance between the sets of illustrations is very close. The Qajar period produced a rich body of pictorial work portraying the battle of Karbala. My aim behind this technique is for the audience to get a glimpse of the battle scene, and feel its horror despite the absence of accurate historical delineation. Through the layering technique, I also created a three dimensional effect thus, allowing the images to stand out to the viewer rather than remaining flat.

Here, I addressed the idea that the numerous layers of history about the importance of Karbala – as a metaphor and language to be applied for the continuation of injustices inflicted upon the communities at other moments in time—are not fixed, but fluid, open and subject to individual interpretation. For example, *Um* Muhammed disagrees with the master narrative which claims that Husayn fought the entire army by himself until he was finally killed. She challenges this claim which she finds to be

illogical and exaggerated in order to aggrandize Husayn's strength and courage. She agrees that Husayn was a courageous warrior who fought heroically against his opponents, though asserts it was not possible for him to fight the entire army by himself. Upon asking *Um* Muhammed and *Um* 'Ali about their interpretations of Zaynab's role and if they see any difference between her role in the text, lamentation poetry and history, they responded that they did not see much of a difference other then when narrators depict Zaynab's primary role as the weeper. They both challenged that description and asserted that Zaynab's role was that of a leader who, despite her affliction, was able to be the spokesperson of the movement who transmitted the happenings of the Karbala battle in such a way that it won her the public's support against Yazid. In response, Yazid had to acquiesce to Zaynab and begged her forgiveness. In order to win her support, Yazid provided her with shelter and transportation for her voyages to Karbala and later Medina.

The Second Tomb: Commemorating Lineage and Fluidity

The second tomb depicts an image of the Prophet Muhammed holding the slain 'Ali.[82] Mohammed's face is covered with a white *hijab,* since in Islam depictions of the Prophet are considered sacrilegious (See Figure I.8. on the following page). I placed an image of Muhammed and 'Ali—which captures the latter with a sword-induced gash in his head—over the black tomb, with a lamentation poem[83] below it. The use of the image of Prophet Muhammed and *Imam* 'Ali is especially designed to represent the lineage of the characters of the Shi'ite narrative, and their relationship to the story of the battle of Karbala. Although the illustration is that of Muhammed carrying the slain 'Ali, the poem

laments Husayn—a non-linear or chronological, meta-historical rendition of Islamic history.

Figure I.8. Prophet Muhammed holding the slain 'Ali.

The poem beneath the image of the slain 'Ali, which I translated from Iraqi colloquial to English, is called "Oh joy of Zahra."[84] By using this poem, I added another layer to the centrality of lineage in Shi'ite narrative. This poem about Husayn is not merely a link between Husayn and the battle of Karbala. In fact, there is a longer history, dating back to the death of the Prophet, and the division between the Sunni and Shi'ite communities. Since Prophet Muhammed died a long time before *Imam* Ali's demise, the viewer must understand how the depiction of the image on the tomb suggests a metaphorical presence. The Prophet carrying the slain 'Ali signifies both lineage, and his support of 'Ali. The lamentation poem: "Oh joy of Zahra" in colloquial Iraqi eulogizes Husayn, and narrates his lineage. The words in the poem resonate, on many levels, referring to earlier events and texts in Islamic history.

O fifth name[85] O joy of Zahra
This night, the voice of victory sings your name,
you the scion and beloved one of the Prophet

O Father of the prostrater[86]

And it calls: today the Master of the Youth of paradise[87] is born,

and sings again and again

A birth for the world [to celebrate], a birth that honors every proud descendent [of him i.e.: Husayn]

O You the fortress of all glory!

Tonight Husayn from the joy of your birth the light of God's law and the guidance of his Prophet are born

You're the offspring of the chosen one [Prophet Muhammad]

the most honorable and purest of ancestors

The inheritor of the chosen one

You are the blossom of Haydar [referring to Ali] and Fatemeh

The pride of the Charging One [referring to one of Ali's nicknames: the Charging Lion or *Haydar-al-Karrar*].

My use of this particular image was not merely for stylistic reasons, nor was it the flight of fancy of the artist who created the original image. Both, the artist and I, portray that which is central to Shi'ism, and to the commemoration of the battle of Karbala—a slippage between the present, and a past which is not fixed or linear whatsoever. The depiction and the lamentation poem merge three main characters together: Muhammed, 'Ali, and Husayn. Together, these three characters illustrate a method used both in the Shi'ite tradition, and by myself, to represent the multiple historical narratives and encrusted meanings that congregate in Shi'ism, and in the practice of the *'Ashura* commemoration.

The image and poem refer to the fluid interpretations that are part and parcel of *'Ashura*, as well as the importance of lineage, and the link between the past and the present. Thus, "according to Shi'i tradition, the Karbala tragedy transcends the confines of time and space; as one proverb says: 'Every day is *'Ashura* and every place is

Karbala.'"[88] The commemoration of *'Ashura* requires the past and the present to co-exist through ritual practices at the same time that the artist, the poet, the *Radoud* and myself ritualize—as we engage in the process of making art, poetry, and music. The final artistic output is as open to interpretation as the rituals, storyline, and lineages of *'Ashura* itself. Fluid traditions, here, produce sinuous art forms just as sinuous art forms have historically produced fluid traditions in the past.

'Ashura rituals are based on these fluid interpretations, which are deeply rooted in artistic and aesthetic practices. The image also depicts the iconographic tradition within Shi'ite Islam in contrast to Sunni Islam. Since Islamic orthodoxy privileges literal interpretations of texts, it considered the representation of animate form to be sacrilegious[89]. Most of the literature about the artistic tradition surrounding the *'Ashura* incident focuses on Iran, specifically the Ta'ziyeh and its related arts.[90] I will provide several examples of the ideas emerging from this sort of literature.

Some of the earliest works of art depicted representations of humans despite Islamic orthodoxy condemning this art form. In the fourteenth century and onwards, Persian artists interpreted Islamic histories through the illustrations of the Prophet, his family, and his companions in their art work[91]:

> The impact which the Ta'ziyeh dramas had on the visual arts in one of the most curious developments in the history of Islamic art. After hundreds of years of censure, during the nineteenth century there appear paintings of religious subjects which specifically were intended for the Iranian public at large. Basically a folk art, these representations are included in the popular school generally known as *qahveh khaneh* painting, but since the major theme of those dealing with religious subjects is the martyrdom of Hussein and his followers at Kerbela, a more apt and specific term for the particular genre s Karbala painting.[92]

Since Ta'ziyeh dramas were performed by devout Muslims—and had been accepted by the public, despite the orthodox people's disapproval of them—the transition

of tolerating religious paintings and other visual art forms was favored amongst Shi'a communities.

The Third Tomb: Lamenting and Honoring Zaynab

The third tomb portrays an image of the battle of Karbala, which also contains a lamentation poem beneath it. The Karbala battle scene was also taken from *Honar va Mardom* (Art and People journal); however, the lamentation poem "O oppressed one rise"[93] attached to this image was taken from Al-Karbalai's anthology which I also translated from Iraqi colloquial to English. The image and the lamentation poem address the theme of oppressed and oppressor, resistance, and fighting for a sacred cause in Shi'a narratives. The lamentation poem begins with "O oppressed one rise,"[94] where Zaynab is calling her oppressed brother *Imam* Husayn to awaken or stand up. The poem illustrates Zaynab's role in the narrative, and it also sheds light on her relationship to her brother, and to the movement in general.

O oppressed one rise, and welcome *Hawra'*[95] [ie: Zaynab]
She came to narrate what took place on the day of 'Ashura
And she calls: O help me
My heart melted, O help me
This is a story of sorrow
Of two faces, each with many sides
Told by tears flowing from the eye
Pouring from the heart
The story says
When Husayn's body was brought back, his grave embraced his heart
Zaynab responded with a scream from the valley of death
Listen to her heart's call
I [ie: Zaynab] left behind my Suns radiant with blood [referring to her family resembling the Sun in radiance, glory and warmth, or in being the center of society]
I [ie: Zaynab] came to Karbala and found nothing but graves
Where is my pillar [Zaynab referring to the support of her family]
O help me
My heart melted O help

The Fourth Tomb: Repetition of Images

The fourth tomb is also painted in black with four silk screen images superimposed on it. The four images taken from *Honar va Mardom* (Art and People) journal)[96] are repeated four times. The ghostly image is of a man—who could be Husayn—standing beside his dead horse. The background is the aftermath of a battle scene, which contains dead bodies and horses. I chose this image to illustrate the centrality of the violent and gruesome battle scene in Shi'a narrative. The repetition theme utilized as a process of engagement with participants in Shi'a narrative, symbolism and imagery was simulated through my use of repeating the same image four times on the tomb. The repetition in the narratives and rituals conjures up mental images that stir up the believers' emotions, and strengthen their beliefs. The emotional bond it creates emphasizes the loss, grief, suffering, and martyrdom of *Imam* Husayn and *ahl-al-bayt*. As quoted by William A. Graham and Mary Douglas in *Natural Symbols: Ritualism* defines ritual theory as "heightened appreciation of symbolic action," which is manifest in the "belief in the efficacy of instituted signs." She refers to faith in either the magical or sacramental character of ritual acts. Douglas uses the term 'condensed symbols' to refer to "highly complex, multivalent, but specific symbols."[97]

The Fifth Tomb & Hanging Storyline: Gender Narratives

On the fifth black tomb, I placed the same poem that appeared on the second tomb, namely, the "O joy of Zahra"[98] poem. I decided to repeat the same poem for both technical reasons, and also to illustrate the centrality of Fatemeh in relation to Husayn, and her kinship to the Shi'ite narratives. In this verse of the lamentation poem, Jesus

praises Husayn by comparing the Virgin Mary to Fatimeh. Jesus then concedes to Husayn by acknowledging Al Mahdi's role as the redeemer and liberator of human kind. He is also known as the Hidden *Imam*, since he has been in occultation and will reappear at the end of time "He will avenge the blood and wrongs of all those who were martyred or persecuted in the way of God from the beginning of the world... The return of the *Mahdi,* therefore, will provide the natural conclusion of this long cosmic drama."[99] It is important to note that there are many similarities between Shi'ite and Christian—especially Catholic—imagery and narratives. It is also significant to note that Al Mahdi and Jesus play similar roles in the account. Both Jesus and Al Mahdi descend to earth at the end of the temporal world to free the nations from misguidance, and lead them to redemption. Mahmoud Ayoub provides an interesting comparison between Christ and Shi'i *Imams*:

> The *imams* collectively are like Christ for the Shi'i community. Each of them, moreover, embodies one or several aspects of this quasi-Christological personality. On Earth, Husayn was the embodiment of the betrayed and suffering martyr, mirroring Christ in his sufferings. The twelfth *Imam*, the *Mahdi*, on the other hand, mirrors in his personality and mission the judging and victorious Christ, the Christ who is to come on the clouds of heaven, whose return the community still awaits with anxious anticipation. The time of his concealment *(ghaybah)* is a time of travail, a period of disintegration which must precede the final restoration. Finally, like the second coming of Christ, his reappearance of return *(raj'ah)* will be a time of fear and remorse, of going astray and general chaos. All this, however, will be followed by a long period of peace, prosperity, and the final triumph of truth over falsehood when justice and equity will reign forever.[100]

The main reason I decided to translate the following section of the "O joy of Zahra" is to demonstrate Fatimeh's matriarchal position as viewed by the women I encountered and within Shi'ite narratives. I also wanted to create a smooth transition to the pictorial plot hanging on the wall, which focuses on Zaynab's leading role in the epic.

If Jesus wanted to boast of the glory of Mary [his mother]
And make clear her magnificence
O Husayn your mother is Fatimeh the crown of pride and chastity
Gabriel is at her service
If he says [i.e.: Jesus] from my cradle I spoke the words of wisdom

From Lord's guidance
You are [i.e.: Husayn] the father of the guided one [the hidden *Imam*] Al Mahdi
who frees the nation's existence
And destroys misguidance
You Lord everywhere
O joy of Zahra

The narratives hanging on the left wall of the first room, which Al-Karbalai also refers to, depict Zaynab as the spokesperson for the movement (See Figure I.3). For instance, "Morteza Motahhari (the prominent modern Shi'i theologian) has portrayed Zaynab as spokesperson for the cause after the massacre as the second half of Hosayn's movement [i.e., not merely a marginal role]"[101]

In spite of her defeat and affliction, Zaynab's selfless and unconditional support for her brothers on the journey to Karbala, her aid before and during the battle, then her role as the voice of her martyred brother in face of his tyrannical murderers and adversaries, all make her a model Shi'i women should incessantly aspire to play. Zaynab's heroic sacrifice is not limited to the support she provides her brother. Not only did she watch her brother fight and die during the battle, she also sent her own sons to be martyred as they defended Husayn in a battle seen as the ultimate sacrifice.

In part of the plot, Zaynab epitomizes the tragedy. Looking at the headless bodies of her brother, half brothers, nephews, cousins, and their followers, Zaynab laments:

> Woe to you [Prophet] Muhammad, woe to you! The angels of heavens pray for you [and] here Hussein in the wilderness covered in blood, his body cut to pieces. O woe to you Muhammad, your daughters are slaves and your descendents killed, left for the wind to blow dust over.[102]

However, the defeated and bereaved Zaynab stands in front of those who betrayed her brother— the people of Kufah— and shows their guilt versus her strength. Zaynab— along with the rest of the humiliated women of the House of the Prophet— were chained

to each other. The captured women were then dragged along with the bleeding head of their brother Husayn, which was impaled on a lance, they traveled in this way from Karbala to Kufa in Iraq, then to Yazid's courts in Damascus. This is where Zaynab heroically condemned Yazid for the murder of her brother *Imam* Husayn and the rest of their family members and followers. Her role as the spokesperson for the movement, and her courageous denunciation of Yazid became legendary.

In Yazid's court, the captured sister of the defeated *Imam*, challenged her brother's killer, and spoke to him:

> You weave all your conspiracies, go after all your aims, and do all you can [and still] by God [you will not succeed. You will fail] to erase our mention, kill our divine message or compete with our glory. Nor will you relieve yourself from shame [of what you did to Husayn]. For is your opinion but false? And your days are but numbered? And you hoards are but divided on the Day [of Judgment] when the caller calls "God's curse is on the unjust?" So praise be to God who ended [the life] of the first of us with happiness and forgiveness and the last of us with martyrdom and mercy.[103]

The events that took place, before and after this incident, are also an essential part of the plot. According to the women I interviewed and texts I consulted, Zaynab's role becomes critical, as the spreader of the message, and the sustainer of the struggle. Fatimeh—despite being dead long before Karbala—plays a crucial role in the narrative as well. She is revered as Husayn's mother and caregiver, as 'Ali's wife and partner, as the daughter of the Prophet, and as the matriarch of the movement. Fatemeh's "role as mother and educator of Hosayn, as well as her role as one of the purified fourteen who suffered for the cause of Islam, cannot be separated from the Karbala's event, even though she was not present at the battle itself [although in many narratives she is brought into the narrative symbolically or metaphysically]."[104]

Projected Photograph: Gendered Silhouettes

The image on the back wall is a slide of a photograph that I took in 2004 in Karbala, Iraq (See Figure I.9. Photograph of the 'Gendered Silhouettes' Installation on the following page). The photograph depicts silhouettes of Lubna and Luma—my cousins—in black '*abaya*'s standing in front of an installation— one of the many installations built by community members during the 2004 commemorations of *'Ashura.* These installations, which you will see more photographs of in the third room, line up the many streets of downtown Karbala, leading to the city square where the holy shrines of *Imam* Husayn and 'Abbas dominate. This specific installation is a high structure containing multiple levels that is similar to a mantelpiece. Each level holds many elaborate lanterns called *lale*`, which are probably Persian-made. The mantelpiece is made out of wood, but the front part is made out of mirrors. Hence, the *lale*` and the light that it projects is magnified. A larger structure—an arched green fabric stretched out by four pillars—is built around the vibrant mantelpiece. The pillars have a functional purpose since they hold the crescent shaped fabric. These pillars also have aesthetic appeal due to the florescent lights that surround the pillars. Smaller lights dangle from the edges of the fabric, and a larger dazzling chandelier suspends from the center. On one side of the structure, a large poster of *Imam* 'Ali hangs, and on the other side, another poster of *Imam* Husayn rests. The posters depict the *Imams* wearing green turbans which are both encircled by a nimbus, representing their reverence. It seems as if the images of the *Imams* stand as guardians. The entire structure is a light spectacle in contrast to the black silhouetted female images in the center of the photograph.

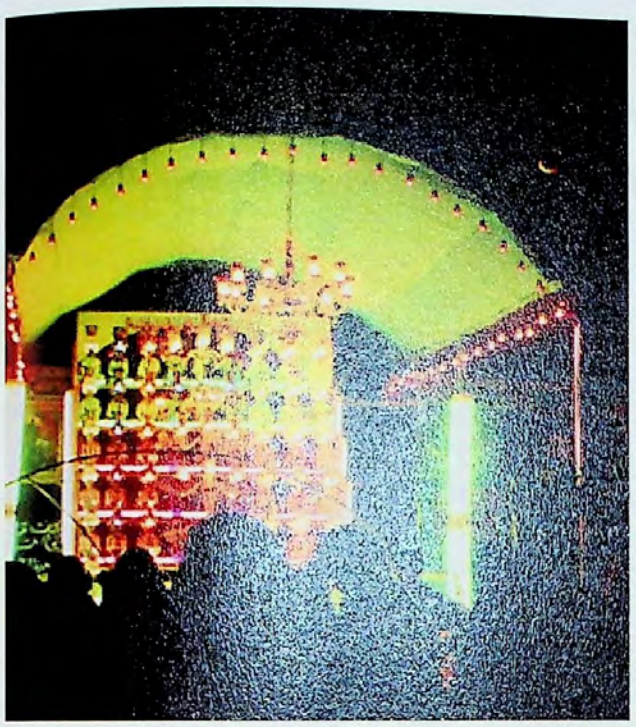


Figure I.9. Photograph of the 'Gendered Silhouettes' Installation taken in Karbala, 2004.

I chose the silhouetted photograph as the backdrop to this room to illustrate how women are central, yet sometimes, depicted as marginal. The theme of silhouettes representing females—with their centrality and marginality—will be omnipresent throughout the exhibit. One of the reasons I chose to construct a mixed media installation was to follow in the tradition of constructing installations by Shi'ite communities in Karbala during the 2004 commemorations of *'Ashura*. *Um* Muhammed views the installations constructed during *'Ashura* as creative expressions by community members memorializing the tragic events of the Karbala battle and immortalizing Husayn's martyrdom. As a child, she remembers feeling delighted upon encountering similar installations since it reminded her of Husayn. I chose installation art since it is representative of my attempt to defy simple definitions while opening up the space for multiple meanings and interpretations. Installation art also compliments my interdisciplinary approach which attempts to challenge traditional boundaries. Hence,

installation art transgresses the fixedness of any one tradition or genera. Installation art is also a comprehensive three dimensional tool which engages the audience and participants in dialogue with the space around them. The audience's encounter and involvement with the space transformed the work itself. For example, numerous members of the audience tied the green ribbons (which I had provided for them) around the shrine's gratings (a detailed description will follow in Chapter Two).

The large colorful installation constructed by the community as a *nadhr* stand in contrast to the black silhouettes at the forefront of the photograph. The black female silhouettes force the viewers to focus on them, since they are at the center of the photograph, and in contrast to the vivid structure in the background. The black female silhouettes demonstrate how women—both in the Shi'a narratives, and in the way I have depicted them in my installation—are the main pillars which contain and transcend the Shi'a narrative. Women in the past, such as Zaynab, or in the present, such as my cousins and I, have been the transmitters of Shi'i history. Hence, women played a significant role in defining and transmitting history through various modes, such as personal narratives and creative practices. None of these vehicles are fixed; they are rather very fluid, depending on the historical moments, geographic locations, political/economic/social circumstances and orientations.

For example, at Yazid's courts, Zaynab's courageous choice to narrate the horrific events that took place during and after the battle in Karbala transforms the outcome into a victory instead of a defeat. Zaynab understood the importance of spreading the message of Islam and of the Karbala incident through declaiming her own, and *ahl-al-bayt's* struggle. If it was not for her oratory expressiveness of the story of Karbala, the message

would not have been transmitted or spread; it would not have endured for many centuries. She knew the power and eloquence of her words very well. Through her sermons, Zaynab was finally able to accomplish the victory, and set the course of the Shi'a movement as Syed Akbar Hyder illustrates through his interpretation of Iftikhar Arif's[105] poetry:

> Karbala must be constructed by the inclusion of Zaynab. Zaynab is produced symbolically as the one who has the transformative role in Karbala—the bravery and strength so closely associated with her father are given a new meaning through Zaynab's patient struggle, wherein physical battles are replaced by the battle of words. She leads Islam on a new path by accomplishing in the palaces of Kufa and Damascus a nonviolent victory. Tear-filled eyes testify to the resilience of the traditions of commemoration that Zaynab began. Zaynab's struggle begins where Hosayn's ends-during the dark night after the massacre at Karbala.[106]

Rashid Torbi, one of the foremost Shi'a orators of South Asia reflects on Zaynab's sermons at Yazid's court, and he explains how Zaynab illustrated her skilled and strategic use of commemorations to define history and the Shi'ite movement. Torbi says: "Have you seen this? This is an oppressor's court. This is a tyrant's court. This is a despot's court. This is a murderer's court and that is the daughter of the Lion of God [Ali]. It is this sermon of Zaynab that has preserved these Houses [Shi'a Houses] for centuries."[107] Hence, it is evident that Zaynab was—and still is in Shi'i beliefs—according to the interviewees—instrumental in defining the Karbala narrative, the initiator of the tradition of commemorations, the spokesperson for the Shi'a movement, and the defining pillar of an oral tradition. Zaynab and the other women of *ahl-al-bayt,* continue to play a central role in the Shi'a narrative even though their roles seem undermined at times by the dominant male figures of 'Ali and Husayn.

According to *Um* Muhammed, Zaynab is sometimes depicted as the 'weeper' by some Radoud's and Mullayah's. She finds this depiction of Zaynab as offensive and incorrect. She views Zaynab as a person who had to endure tremendous affliction and horror while showing strength, resilience and courage. She asserts that Zaynab

transformed the calamity into a victorious movement. She also disagrees with depictions of the martyrs (men) and the survivors (women and children) as victims. To the contrary, she sees them as triumphant warriors. She views Zaynab's role at Yazid's court to be instrumental in defining and spreading the movement, while it exposed Yazid's tyranny. She asserts that Yazid responded by releasing Zaynab and provided her with housing. Upon her request to go back to Karbala, Yazid supplied her transportation. *Um* Muhammed also commended Zaynab for raising all the surviving orphans and being an exemplary role model to them.

In this chapter, I have highlighted various narratives such as Karbala, that of Zaynab and by female members of my family, as well as the latter's relationship to ritual practices (*Qirayeh* and *'Ashura).* Through the sharing of women's accounts, I demonstrated their strong connection to these rituals even when they were banned under the previous Iraqi regime. I suggest that these rituals play a central role in defining these women's Iraqi Shi'a identities. I elaborated on the use of space (city square of Karbala, shrine and private homes) and these ritual practices by numerous agents (such as the women, the community, the state and the U.S. occupying forces as well as Karbala security forces) to advance a wide range of political projects that consistently influence Iraqi Shi'a women's identities. I established this by shedding light on their different instants: female *Qirayeh* ceremonies in private homes, the 1991 Karbala uprising, and the 2004 *'Ashura* commemorations in Iraq. I verified that these rituals and spaces proved to be locations for recovery, healing and resistance for the women and the community.

Chapter Two

The Second Room: Art as Sacred/Constructing the Installation as Sacred Pilgrimage

> In myth and ritual, time and space are treated as loci of the sacred. Karbala has it special significance in Shi'i piety because it is the locus of the sacred remains of the *Imam*; similarly, the day of *'Ashura* is especially sacred because it is the locus, so to speak, of this sufferings. Hence, performing the *ziyarah* [visitation ceremonies] ritual in Karbala on the day of *'Ashura* has great merit.
>
> Mahmoud Ayoub[108]

In this chapter, I will demonstrate how I construct the art installation as a sacred pilgrimage which is informed by experiences of the women I interact with, my own, as well as texts. Constructing the installation is in many ways a journey or quest for the sacred, similar to the process of embarking upon a pilgrimage to the *Imam's* shrine. The process of reconstructing the sacred through the creative practice and ritual of making the installation is sacred in itself. The practice of creating art, exhibiting, and setting out to interact with the art in public spaces is parallel to voyaging to a sacred journey, "the collections become shrines for the artist pilgrims in need of worship or in search of light."[109] Creating art for me is in essence tapping into an inner expression that becomes visible through the process of producing the art work and exhibiting it. This inner expression finds voice and healing through its quest for the sacred or what is hidden or unknown within the psyche, similar to the process undergone by pilgrims to the shrine of Husayn. The exploration of the sacred through the creative practice of building the exhibit is an embodiment of cultural, social, historical, religious, artistic, political ideals that for me have been and continue to be eradicated by the present realities in Iraq and the diasporas. In this chapter I will walk you through the second room identifying the multiple journeys I undergo by constructing narratives of Shi'ism, the three generations

of women and my own through the material objects, creating an experience which is parallel to the journeys pilgrims undertake.

Contextualizing the Second Room

The present neo-colonial occupation of Iraq and the violence that has engulfed Iraq and Iraqi society has resulted in producing the fastest growing refugee and displaced population in the world. The displacement of Iraqis did not begin with the U.S. invasion in 2003, though the occupation severely augmented the crisis. Within the last four years, millions of Iraqis continue to flee their homes and homeland, mainly to neighboring countries such as Jordon, Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon. According to testimonies by Iraqi friends and families immigrating or seeking immigration to these neighboring countries, they do not perceive these counties as their final destination; the majority of these refugees aspire to immigrate to Western European countries, Canada, and the U.S. Displacement of Iraqis into the diaspora began with the exodus of Jews in the late 1940s and early 1950s,[110] which was triggered by the socio-political climate created by the establishment of the Zionist "state" of Israel onto Palestinian Land. The deportations of Iraqi Shi'is during the "late 1970s on account of their alleged 'Persian connection'"[111] in the thousands produced another kind of diaspora. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, thousands of Iraqis were forced to evacuate their homeland as a result of the ethnic cleansing campaigns waged against the Kurds and Shi'ites. Saddam Husayn's repressive regime, the Iraq-Iran war from 1980 to 1988, the First Gulf war in 1991, and the thirteen year sanctions from 1990-2003, are all factors which drastically contributed to the mass departure of thousand of Iraqis into the diaspora. During this period, Iraqis of all sects and ethnicities began to flee mainly to other Arab countries, Europe, the U.S, Australia,

and New Zealand. Today, we are witnessing unprecedented numbers of Iraqis fleeing their war-torn homeland in search of safety and shelter elsewhere. At the same time, internally displaced Iraqis who are not able to leave Iraq, face dire conditions on a daily basis.

My experiences and work have been shaped by Iraq's and Iraqis' diasporic modern history. The first wave of my father's family left during the deportation period that took place between 1979 and 1980 to Iran and Syria. My two cousins, as a response to their brothers' arrest and later executions, escaped to the US. The second wave of migration by family members, left during the 1990s to U.A.E. and Jordon. The third wave fled Iraq during the last four years as a response to the invasion and its aftermath. Most of them fled to Jordon, Syria, U.A.E, and other neighboring countries in the hope that they will make it to Western European countries or the U.S. Only few family members remain in Iraq today. As a result, the need to reconstruct, record and reinterpret these histories and experiences through conceptual and visual languages have become vital for me during a time of horrific violence and annihilation. The women I encountered also engage in reconstructing these histories through the various ritual practices they participate in, as well as the creative practices they perform during these rituals. For example, my aunt declares that by holding commemorative ceremonies and inviting a female narrator to recite eulogies, she ensures that the history and narratives are being passed from one generation to the other.

Taraneh Hemami's (an artist residing in the Bay Area, CA and a professor of Art) work resonates with me and speaks to my own experiences and labor. She eloquently

describes how her art work is able to explain the multiplicity of her experiences and become a place to explore the in-betweeness of spaces:

> The complex socio-political issues surrounding Islam and Iran have continued to affect my life and my work. In the past ten years, my work has increasingly become the visual and conceptual language with which I record, translate and interpret my hybrid existence, creating personal as well as collective archives that transform cultural memory into the material world. Exploring themes of displacement, preservation, and memory, my works translate the multiplicity of my experiences into a physical and tactile one, investigating the in-between spaces; between art, artifact and architecture, between two and three-dimensional space, between technology and hand crafted objects.[112]

Hence, the art installation is a material translation, an interpretive conceptual and creative expression of displacement, memory, narrative, and cultural recovery through the prism of the sacred.

The women I interviewed view the sacred as God and the Husayn's shrine as the vehicle to convey their prayers and petitions. Hence, they assert that some of the rituals and creative practices they participate in are expressions and a quest to God. I choose the sacred not out a quest to God, but rather my fascination with the conceptual and artistic meaning of the sacred. I interpret the sacred throughout the installation, though for me the process and ritual of creating the art work and performance is sacred in itself. My need to decipher the sacred is a quest for salvation and transformation through creative practices during a time of war, horror, and disillusionment. As noted, this specific community in many ways has been doing the same by invoking the sacred through creative practices and narratives. By doing so, they have been able to turn narratives and memories into oral traditions which carry a message of salvation and transformation. Barbara Myerhoff suggests:

> 'transformation' in ritual performances inclines us toward emotionally intense and absorbing rituals, thus precludes us from attending to one of the major functions of ritual performances: that of establishing a distance from a situation or emotion. Rituals are reenactments, not original occurrences, and they are repetitive and highly stylized. These features control and delimit as well as inspire and arouse strong subjective states. Freud, Malinowski, and others have stressed ritual performances as coming into play during

> crises and times of distress to provide distance and control (...). The re-experiencing, not merely the re-performing of the original source of distress, is essential for catharsis to occur, (...), in a properly distanced fashion.[113]

I agree with Myerhoff's analysis regarding the re-experiencing of the source of pain to achieve catharsis. Time and again I witnessed female members of my family partake in *'Ashura* rituals as a means to achieve catharsis. Their own pain and distress interconnects with their process for mourning the *Imam* and his family. This method might be a way for them to distance themselves from their current hardship, while making it easier for them to cope with their own grief. Hence, by grieving for *ahl-al-bayt* they are inadvertently grieving for their own losses and despair. Though, I recall one of the cases stood out as an anomaly to this assumption: My cousin, who in 2004 was undergoing severe depression, was restricted by her mother from attending the rituals. My aunt and my cousin's husband were concerned that by attending the rituals, she might conjure up more grief then she was ready to partake in at the time. They were concerned that she would be further traumatized by experiencing anguish from past traumas related to the war and repression by Saddam Husayn.

The mundane reality of bombs exploding in the middle of the most sacred spots killing hundreds of people was one of the reasons which propelled me to interpret the sacred and people's intrigue with it. The repeated attacks on sacred places throughout the occupation have become normalized and expected, especially during religious commemorations. For example, on March 2nd, 2004 nine bomb explosions resulted in the slaying of 170 Iraqi Shi'a Muslims who were commemorating *'Ashura* and injured 500 others, "the bombings brought one of the deadliest days in the Iraq occupation after the Iraq War to topple Saddam Hussein."[114] I recall pilgrims persistently flooding the city center even after the March 2nd bombings. On that day, Lubna and I were strolling into

the city center while I was filming the commemorations and interviewing pilgrims. As we approached *Imam* Husayn's shrine, we spotted smoke and flames from a nearby distance close to *Imam* 'Abass's shrine which is on the other side of the city square. Within minutes we heard sirens and saw ambulances dash by.

No one knew what was happening, though strangely enough in the middle of the commotion I felt a sense of calmness around me since most people went about their business and daily rituals as usual. The sense of serenity that I felt could have been also related to my own internal state. It could also be connected to the normalization of the on going chaotic and explosive daily situations in Iraq. More ambulances kept racing by and people began to move about in different directions. Even though I could not figure out exactly where the explosion came from, I began moving towards what seemed to be the direction of the bombings but the area was closed off. Lubna was hesitant and decided she wants to head back home since family members must have heard about the incident and were probably worried about us. I was able to persuade her to stay for a while longer so I may film and speak to people around me. As we continued walking in between the crowds of pilgrims we both noticed how serene everything seemed in the midst of the chaos. As more ambulances rushed by we began to notice men pushing wooden carts and running in the direction of the blast. We were not sure if the carts were meant for the wounded, dead, or just attempting to quickly escort older pilgrims out of the area.

I kept filming until the commotion seemed to submerge in the background as I focused my lens on the hundreds of women standing in front of Sayeda Zaynab's shrine. These women seemed ambivalent to what was happening around them as they continued their ritual practices of chest beating, weeping, and recitations. Their black robes covered

the entire front doorsteps of the golden shrine. I was intrigued by their captivated stance and their commitment to their practices in the midst of the upheaval round them. Soon after, Lubna and I made our way back home. As we walked into the doorway, we were met with disbelief by my aunt who was worried sick about us. My aunt immediately told me that my mother has been calling non-stop from California since she was concerned about my safety and wanted to make sure I was not on location when the bombs exploded. I immediately called my mother back and to my surprise found out that she knew the full report regarding the explosions from several news broadcasts: where exactly it took place, how many bombs went off, how many people were reported dead and/or injured, who are the suspects, etc…

I found it interesting that I was one block away from the account yet could not share with her any of those details, while she was on the other side of the world and could relay back to me with vivid details an account of what had happened. I recall seeing numerous international news agencies with their sophisticated camera equipment encircling the rooftops of the city square. Such moments made me realize the extent of transformation brought into our lives, cities, communities, and practices through international media and the impact it has in connecting us to a transnational community.

An Overview of the Second Room: A Navigated Voyage Between the Fixed Seen and Fluid Unseen

In contrast to the first room, where many components were present, the second room is minimalist in nature. A minimalist temperament prevails throughout the exhibit, though the second room is the most representative of that spirit. As you make your way to the end of the first room, you notice an entrance to the left which leads you into the

second room. As you pace in, you will see both the second and third rooms at once. In the second room, you are drawn to the centripetal shrine of *Imam* Husayn *(Maqam)* which at first seems to dominate the center of the room (Refer to Figure I.4). In contrast to this dense and fixed construction in the center of the room, you intuitively notice the centrifugal tension sparked by four, black, elongated silhouettes draping from the ceiling to the floor across each corner of the shrine (See Figure I.10. Black Silhouettes). As you make your way to the other side of the shrine, you detect a black mantelpiece placed against a dividing wall. The black box upholds the plate filled with the green ribbons of various sizes. On the right side of the wall, you encounter the entrance to the third room while on the left side you come across the hallway which leads you into the fourth and final room.

Figure I.10. Black Silhouettes.

Reconstruction of Imam Husayn's Shrine (Maqam)

The reconstructed shrine is a massive, rectangular, three-dimensional, black tomb/sepulcher. The shrine is made of wood to the dimensions of approximately H: 1.9m x L: 1.9m x W: 0.75 meters, where the bottom quarter is solid, in contrast to the balance which is porous. Upon closer inspection, you will notice that the pores are in fact an intricate construction of arabesque panels which provide view into the tomb. The lighting in this room was set up in such a way so that it illuminated the arabesque designs. The illumination of the arabesque designs reflected elaborate star-like shapes enhancing its splendor. These reflections further enhanced the themes of this room which represent the concept of the marginal and unseen (the silhouettes) vs. the central and seen (the shrine). As you come up to the shrine and peer through the arabesque holes into the encasement, you become aware of Husayn's simulated martyred corpse covered in black cloth impaled by silver arrows (See Figure I.11. Arrows piercing the martyred Husayn). I pierced the arrows into the replicated corpse to represent the depictions of Husayn's abhorrent slaying in Shi'a imagery.

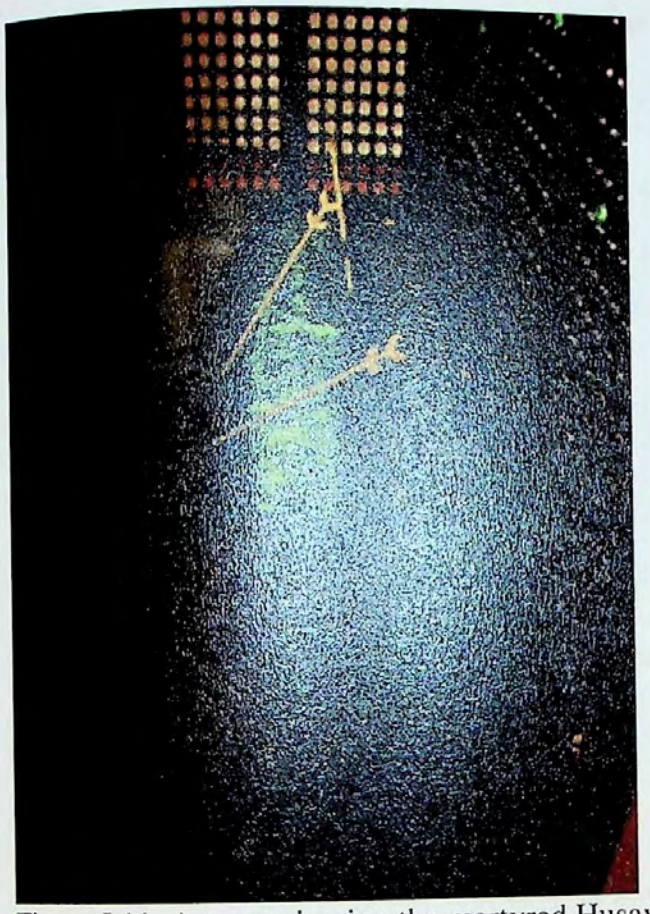


Figure I.11. Arrows piercing the martyred Husayn.

I designed the shrine in such a way so that it serves multi-functional purposes for later use. The arabesque panels are all removable except for one so that it can be used as the back rest for the new chaise lounge. The plank, where the corpse lies, becomes the resting place for the couch's cushion pad. The board itself is removable to give access to the storage room underneath. The entire structure is collapsible so it could be easily transported and shipped in the future. I conceptualized the design of the shrine with several other artists, carpenters, and artisans. I worked closely with a skilled carpenter for a few months until we produced the final product. Upon explaining to the audience the multi-functional uses of the structure, many of them amusingly laughed in surprise since they thought it was an innovative approach and appreciated its utilitarian use.

Interpretations of the Shrine

The second room which embraces the reconstructed shrine of *Imam* Husayn, specifically represents and embodies symbolic, cultural, and religious ideals sought by pilgrims on their sacred quests to Karbala. The pilgrims travel to Husayn's shrine as a symbolic gesture of renewing their covenant with their bereaved *Imam* while seeking his intercession and blessings. By performing their sorrow as well as emulating his suffering and that of his followers, believers hope to achieve catharsis, salvation, and redemption (refer to Chapter One for more in-depth explanation.) The path to salvation and transformation can be achieved through suffering by pilgrims, "Thus transformed, suffering becomes the great teacher for the pious, their road to salvation. The redemptive power of suffering lies in the fact that suffering can be overcome only by its own power."[115] Affliction is the ultimate test of endurance and faith for these believers. Hence, the more the pilgrims are able to endure on this path, the closer they are to achieving redemption.

The path to salvation is paved (both literally and metaphorically) with suffering and struggle as evident by the following example. As I looked out the moving car window on my way from Baghdad to Karbala during *Muharram* of 2004, I witnessed throughout the entire road trip, hundreds of pilgrims on foot, weeping and beating their chests as they made their way to the shrine city. I saw other men agonizingly crawl through the city square making their way slowly to the shrine as an expression of their loyalty, piety, and humility. Their white robes covered with dirt and drenched in their blood from crawling through the jagged land. Others threw themselves at the shrine gate horizontally toiling with their elbows and knees to the shrine while sorrowfully shedding

tears for their *Imam*. I saw women wrapped in their black '*abaya*'s embracing the shrine and weeping passionately as they recited lamentation verses and pleaded for deliverance. These pilgrims sincerely demonstrate their allegiance, dedication, and steadfastness to their beloved and bereaved *Imam*.

As established earlier, these faithful pilgrims make reference to, through *'Ashura* rituals, the central premise of the Karbala narrative and the main message behind Husayn's martyrdom, which is to establish justice and to struggle against tyranny and injustice. Hence, throughout history, this message was the backbone of successive Shi'ite uprisings against the Umayyad and Abbasid rule. Likewise, throughout modern Iraqi history *'Ashura* was a means for countless revolts and an instrument for mass politics, such as the 1991 and 2004 happenings. I would like to remind the reader that these ceremonies were banned under Saddam Husayn and came back to life full fledged only after the 2003 invasion. For believers, the participation in these rituals is their salvation and means to express their adversity and their repression under the old regime. Their performances are manifestations of grief for their *Imam* and their long history of oppression. Hence, their expressions are not merely cathartic, creative, and a quest towards salvation; their quest to Karbala during *'Ashura* while performing the passionate rituals is a symbol for their unequivocal devotion and a pledge to their *Imam* to continue carrying his message for liberation and fighting against injustice and oppression.

While filming the mass demonstrations during *'Ashura* in 2004, I noticed an elder female bystander weeping as she watched the parade. I decided to interview her, with enthusiasm she proclaimed that they were able to finally achieve justice by removing the tyrannical dictator, Saddam Husayn, from power and that they would one day get rid of

the Americans and the rest of the occupying forces. She declared Karbala as a holy city and *Imam* Husayn as the redeemer from injustice. She continued weeping for her *Imam* as she proclaimed that the city will be liberated and justice would prevail. Mahmoud Ayoub eloquently addresses the merits of weeping for the *Imam* and the sacralization of space and time in his chapter "The Sigh of the Sorrowful":

> (...) sorrow and weeping for the martyrdom of *Imam* Husayn and the suffering of the Holy Family became a source of salvation for those who chose to participate in this unending flow of tears. For human beings, this is a choice which they could make or refuse, thereby choosing salvation or judgment. The rest of creation, however, is by divine decree the stage, as it were, upon which this drama of martyrdom is forever enacted. By being part of the sacred drama, nature itself becomes sacred. This sacralization of nature may be seen symbolically in the sanctity of the days of Muharram, the sacralization of time, and of Karbala, the sacralization of space.[116]

Hence, my interpretation of the installation as a sacred space is a recreation of what Mahmoud Ayoub calls the "sacralization of space and time".

The installation shrine is a symbolic aperture into these histories, narratives, and cultures. *Um* 'Ali (my aunt) declares that she cries every time she visits Husayn's shrine in Karbala since it calls to mind the gruesome tragedy of the Karbala battle. She confesses that the shrine conjures up vivid details of Husayn's slaying and the calamity that befell *ahl-al-bayt*. I, therefore, employ the shrine to bridge the gap between these histories and narratives and my own, and that of the interviewees' experiences of aesthetics, transformation, and the sacred. Alan Morinis suggest that:

> This view of pilgrim's destination allows us to consider the pilgrimage to a collectively designated goal and also to places that somehow represent a store of one's personal ideals. This fashioning of the sacredness of the shrine allows us to see how some secular activities (...) share in many of the older, deeper cultural paradigms and processes of pilgrimage.
>
> It is because pilgrimage centers are repositories for a culture's ideals that they have been so commonly and extensively supported. Political patronage has been common (...). Celebrated pilgrimage places often enshrine relics of the most revered saints or most authenticated apparitions for the divine. These centers have been glorified with the highest expressions of religious art and architecture that cultures have evolved. The result is that the shrine incarnates the ideals it embodies. The message that this place is the holy of holies is strongly reinforced for the pilgrim in the art, architecture, music, drama, and so on that embellish the center. In fact, once the "spiritual magnetism" of the place

> develops (...), it can become so powerful that it overwhelms group or cultural boundaries and so draws pilgrims of many affiliations, who come because of the reputation for power the place projects and manifests through material representation.[117]

The shrine becomes a channel between the sacred and the human realm whereby "The shrine is a rupture in the ordinary domain, through which heavens peeks."[118] *Um* 'Ali visits the shrine to pray since it is a sacred space which connects her to God. She believes the shrine is a conduit for her appeals to Husayn and a place where her petitions can be answered. She views Husayn as her intercessor to God.

Pilgrimage is seen by Alan Morinis as a journey in search of ideals. In the following lines he elaborates on the quest for the sacred:

> I use it to refer specifically to the valued ideals that are the image of perfection that a human being sets out to encounter or become on a pilgrimage. The deity of the shrine is frequently an embodiment of cultural ideals, but it is the pursuit of the ideal (whether deified or not) that defines the sacred journey. The ideals that are the pilgrim's goal are usually-but not always-fixed in space within the perceptible world. Cultures have provided many pathways to seek ideals and some non-geographical goings-forth also fall within the territory of the anthropology of pilgrimage. The reason is that the terrestrial journey tends to be infused with the significance that derives from the expressive archetypes of the spiritual quest, while, conversely, the metaphorical language needed to speak of the ineffable spiritual path draws on the imagery of the pedestrian earthly pilgrim. Meaning, metaphor, practice, and experience are separable for the purposes of discourse but tend to meld into one another in the development of a cultural category of sacred journeys.[119]

For Shi'a the pursuit of their valued ideals revolve around the commemoration of the martyrdom of *Imam* Husayn as well as upholding and embodying his and the rest of *ahl-al-bayt's* characters and missions. Hence, the pilgrimage to Husayn's shrine in Karbala, whether physical or spiritual, during *'Ashura* is in essence a sacred journey in search for valued ideals. Consequently, I employed the meaning of Husayn's martyrdom and Zaynab's drive to advance the movement through her oratory and performance flairs to shed light on cultural and spiritual ideals strived by Shi'ite during a time where these beliefs are much needed to endure the tumultuous realities in Iraq and the diasporas.

Richard Niebuhr, as elucidated by Alan Morinsi, specifies that "the boundaries of the pilgrimage category are defined solely by the limits of the human imagination."[120] Alan Morinis further elaborates on the many categories of pilgrimage:

> Anthropologists tend to pay more attention to actual ritual goings-forth on sacred journeys in geographical space, but the other sorts of venturing toward ideals undertaken by humans are equally pilgrimages. It is, indeed, questionable to distinguish between terrestrial and "metaphorical" pilgrimages. This distinction portrays the earthly journey as somehow more real, when in fact, most cultures subsume physical journeys and other quests into one more inclusive category: the spiritual life is a pilgrimage, the ascetic learns to visit the sacred shrines in his own body, devotion is a journey to God.
> With these considerations in mind, I tender a definition: the pilgrimage is a journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal. At its most conventional, the end of the pilgrimage is an actual shrine located at some fixed geographical point. The place has acquired a reputation that draws pilgrims(...).One who journeys to a place of importance to himself alone may also be a pilgrim. The allegorical pilgrimage seeks out a place not located in the geographical sphere. Some sacred journeys are wanderings that have no fixed goal; the pilgrimage here is the search for an unknown or hidden goal.[121]

My conception of the installation is to simulate a pilgrimage, whereby the audience is invited to walk through and experience the space as a pilgrimage setting. In so doing, the audience experientially is drawn into the space, whereby they may be able to insert their own interpretations, meanings, and practices of this sacred journey. Audience members are enticed to participate in different practices that pilgrims undergo, such as continually navigating fluidly between and around multiple objects, such as the silhouettes, until they reach a fixed locale, namely the shrine in room two.

Fluidly navigating between spaces and matter until one reaches a fixed condition is meant to assist pilgrims in transcending their specific reality and to create a rupture in their everyday life, whereby the pilgrims are able to transcend, through these experiences and practices, their daily routines and realties and enter an elevated realm of awareness. This in-between space is representational of the liminal experience pilgrims undergo during rituals. In the second room and throughout the other rooms, this repetitive navigation and fixed theme unfolds itself in the hopes of manifesting a simulation and

hopefully an actual transcendental state of consciousness. The other theme, that is present in the second room, is the concept of the tension between the fixedness of the central and seen as opposed to the fluid, marginal, and unseen. I summon the shrine of *Imam* Husayn and the gendered silhouettes as emblematic of the tension between the fixedness of the central and the seen, as opposed to the fluid, marginal and the unseen. By inviting the audience to partake in this journey, as well as in some aspects of the ritual and performance in this and other rooms, I hope to move the audience away form their daily routines and stir up a rupture in their own state of awareness (similar to what women experience upon visiting the shrine or participating in the rituals and creative practices) in relation to the themes and experiences I tackle. Victor Turner suggests that "if liminality is regarded as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it can be seen as potentially a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs."[122] I also reconstruct cultural, social, political, gender ideals as a way to weave a new tapestry of definitions and interpretations, such as bringing in a new approach to experiencing and understanding sacred spaces, ritual-creative practices and historical narratives.

Silhouettes

These larger than life ethereal silhouettes are made of black, gauzy, and almost transparent fabric representing female figures wearing black '*abaya*'s (black women's clothing that covers the entire body from head to toe). I bought the material from *Wekalat El Balah* (what used to be the dates market which has been transformed into the fabric market in Cairo). The black gossamer fabric was stitched from one end to an oval shaped wire to represent the heads of females dressed in '*abaya*'s. The silhouettes hung from a

hook in the ceiling by a thin fishing line. They draped from the ceiling to the ground across each angle of the shrine. The elongated silhouettes overshadowed the shrine since they exceeded its height, significantly creating a tension between its height and position and that of the massive scale of the shrine. These female representations hovered across each corner of the shrine, generating an earnest strain between their fluidity and flowing-ness and the shrine's solid fixedness.

Interpretations of the Silhouettes

I depict the silhouettes for the audience as ethereal ones symbolizing the omnipresence of gendered discourses in both Shi'ite narratives (as discussed in Chapter One) and in the way the US administration has co-opted gendered discourses to drive a campaign to rally support for its war on Iraq. During the U.S. campaign to invade Iraq in 2003, the US media routinely manipulated gendered images and employed gendered discourses to establish its legitimacy in invading Iraq. The U.S. media frequently referred to the invasion as a mission to liberate the oppressed Iraqi women from their domineering, terrorizing, and sadistic men. These gendered campaigns for "emancipating" Iraqi women were interwoven with the language of liberating all oppressed peoples in Iraq, specifically the Kurds and the Shi'ites. *Um* 'Ali states that she initially believed the rhetoric broadcasted by the U.S. administration. Later, she came to witness the deception behind their claims as the U.S. administration soon declared their long term occupation of Iraq. This "liberating" operation was commenced with a "Shock and Awe"[123] campaign waged viciously through bombs ripping the bodies of women, children, and men. I recall my visit to Iraq in 2004 when my aunt *Um* 'Ali revealed her horror-struck reactions in response to the "Shock and Awe" operation. She remembers

locking herself at home for the duration of the bombing campaign; nevertheless she heard the excruciating sounds and felt the reverberations. She avowed that she had never heard such monstrous rackets during the first Gulf War and the Iran-Iraq War. She had heard about the "Shock and Awe" drive and suggested that the deafening and thunderous noises were employed as instruments of fear and horror.

By representing the black silhouettes as domineering though transparent, I wanted to convey to the audience that while women have been highly visible symbols in the debates on the war and current events in Iraq, they have also been invisible victims of U.S. military interventions. Hence, I utilized the transparent silhouettes as symbolic of this visible-invisible tension employed by the U.S. military and government. For example, the *Abu-Ghraib* prison scandal exposed the abuse by American soldiers of Iraqi men but did not publicly mention the consistent sexualized violence against the female inmates by American soldiers. In a briefing paper presented to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Kristen McNutt maintains:

> Late last year, attorney Amal Kadham Swadi, one of seven female lawyers now representing women detainees in Abu Ghraib, began to piece together a picture of systemic abuse and torture by US guards against Iraqi women held in detention without charge. This was not only true of Abu Ghraib, she discovered, but was, as she puts it, "happening all across Iraq". Amal Kadham Swadi states that "sexualized violence and abuse committed by US troops goes far beyond a few isolated cases (...). These and other incidents are being covered up for US domestic consumption. President G. W. Bush has insisted that these were the actions of a few and were not the result of military policy. However, a fifty-three-page report, obtained by The New Yorker, written by Major General Antonio M. Taguba and not meant for public release, points to complicity to sexual torture by the entire Army prison system. Specifically, Taguba found that between October and December of 2003 there were numerous instances of "sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuses" at Abu Ghraib.[124]

As a response to such stories and other incidents of sexual assault on women, both by American soldiers and due to the chaotic, anarchic, and violent situation in Iraq, many women were forced to become marginal spectators and invisible phantoms in the public

realm in Iraq, relegated to the unseen private sphere. Hence, I employ the translucent silhouettes as symbolic representatives of the current marginal position and invisible location of Iraqi women in the public realm in Iraq. At the same time, I erected the silhouettes as larger than life ethereal silhouettes to signify how they have been co-opted and exploited by the US war campaign to rally support for its continuous war on Iraq.

The black silhouettes also represent the main female figures in the Karbala stories (such as Fatemeh, Zaynab, her sister Omm Kalthoum, Husayn's daughter Sokayneh, and Kalthoum among others) dressed in '*abaya*'s. I hung these elongated metaphoric figures at the corners of the shrine to symbolize their dominant roles as the main pillars of the movement, since they were the ones who were able to advance the struggle and keep the memory alive through their recounting of the tragic circumstances in Karbala. The black silhouettes specifically represent Zaynab's moving and expressive narrations which became instrumental in defining and advancing the Karbala narratives. Furthermore, the silhouettes represent her performative and oratory skills which transformed the horrific events into a triumphant victory (see Chapter One for a more in-depth discussion of her role). Since then narration and performative rituals marked the fluid evolution of Shi'ite traditions. *Um* Muhammed views Zaynab as a role model that she aspires to emulate. She declares that, if she were placed in Zaynab's situation, she would hope to perform what Zaynab accomplished. She also asserts that she attempts to follow Zaynab's exemplary character in her daily life, whereby she aspires to be as selfless and benevolent in her deeds, courageous and steadfast in her devotion and obligation, as well as master Zaynab's eloquence and oratory mastery.

These silhouettes also personify the women I represent in these chapters who have been deemed as invisible and marginal bystanders by dominant discourses. Through these chapters, I situate their narratives at the heart of my work as a means to demonstrate their central and visible contributions and steadfastness. These women have been central and active participants, yet their stories and narratives have not been accounted for. Hence, my female relatives have proven, time and again, their role model stature as they continue to struggle against all odds.

Um Lubna (my eldest aunt) has been the head of the household since the 1991 Gulf War. She has also been the main caretaker of her husband after he was paralyzed shortly following the first Gulf War. Her husband's son from a previous marriage was called to serve in the army during the invasion of Kuwait. His son deserted and requested refuge in his father's home. The father, fearing for the consequences of the authorities finding out, refused to provide shelter to his son and gave him in (since the entire family would be persecuted as a result of providing shelter for a deserter.) A few months later, the father received the news of his son's death and became partially paralyzed. From that point on, my aunt has not only continued to provide constant supervision and care, but she has also been responsible for the entire household.

Green Ribbons

I bought several meters of green material from the fabric market at *Wekalat El Balah* in Cairo. I requested from a tailor to cut the green fabric into hundreds of short pieces and seam all the edges. I then placed some of the cloth into a bowl which I placed on the black mantelpiece across the shrine. Before the opening night of the exhibit, I tied a green ribbon around one of the star shaped pores of the arabesque panel in a similar

manner to what pilgrims do inside the shrines in Karbala. I did this, to entice the audience/participants to follow in that same tradition. I then placed a descriptive note on the wall above the bowl encouraging the audience to participate in this specific ritual. During the opening night of the exhibit, participants repeatedly walked up to the black mantelpiece and picked a green ribbon and sequentially made their way to the shrine to tie the green ribbons around the star shaped pores of the arabesque panels. By the end of the exhibit, numerous green ribbons adorned the black shrine.

I used the color green for the ribbons since this is the same color used by pilgrims. The green color represents the color of Islam, Prophet Mohammed, and his descendents. Green is believed to be the color used in the past for Islamic banners and flags during battles; it is also held to be the color for peace and paradise. Green is the dominant color throughout Shi'ites iconography and imagery. For example, 'Ali, Husayn, Hassan, and others are depicted wearing green turbans. At the same time, green is a universal color used by the Shi'ites; so for example, banners, flags, and the lights inside the sepulcher are all green.

Pilgrims customarily purchase the green ribbons from Sayyed's (descendents of the Prophet who work as shrine keepers). These pilgrims rub the green strings against the shrine seeking blessings from their *Imam* while making their vows to him. After their vows, pilgrims proceed to tie the green band around the shrine grating or their own wrists. Pilgrims partake in this ritual for multiple reasons, such as to petition for purification from ills, a miracle, and/or blessings from their *Imam*. Lubna suggests that, while vowing, repenting, and pleading for their *Imam* (since he is the intercessor between them and God), the faithful trust that by rubbing the green band against the sepulcher, it

can serve as a medium to salvation. Hence, Shi'a pilgrims hope that God's love for their *Imams*, who are the legatees of His Prophet, will grant them their wishes. A plea is customarily expressed through vowing (*nadhr*) for an offering. The pleaders promise that if their wishes are granted then they will provide an offering of some sort in return. Anne H. Betteridge expressively describes the process of vow-making:

> At a shrine the statement of a vow may be made orally or in written form to be represented by a shred of cloth or piece of string tied to the tomb grating or window. Fastening this cloth or string is referred to as *dakhil bastan*, or "binding the request for help." It is a concrete representation of the petition (...). In an extreme case, someone who is seriously ill may bind himself to the care of the Imam or *imamzadih*. The tying is not just a binding of the saint to pay attention to a request but the initiation of a two-way transaction as well, binding the petitioner to the saint as well. As with most social bonds, it works two ways. If the saint answers the petition, the pilgrim is then bound to provide what has been promised.[125]

I recall my aunt *Um 'Ali* who vowed and pleaded to *Imam* Husayn to rescue her brother (my uncle) who was severely wounded during a bomb explosion in Basra, south of Iraq during the Iraq-Iran war. My uncle miraculously recovered and was rescued from death. My aunt continues up till today carrying out her promise to the *Imam*. My mother recalls that her grandmother had vowed to the *Imam* that if she was granted a boy, she would dress him in black as a symbol of mourning throughout *'Ashura*. Hence, my grandfather throughout his life wore black during the entire month of *Muharram*. Vowing can take many different forms such as distributing water to pilgrims on foot, donating money to the poor, and cooking *Kemma* (a dish customarily cooked during *'Ashura* as a *nadhr*, offering, and distributed to the community), among others.

In this chapter, I have explained that my interest in crafting the art installation and specifically the shrine room was to creatively express some of the conditions surrounding Iraq which have contributed to the displacement of Iraqis internally and into the diaspora. I also provided details of the shrine room as an interpretive conceptual and imaginative

expression of displacement, memory and recovery through the prism of the sacred. I illustrated that the shrine embodies symbolic, cultural, political and religious ideals sought by pilgrims. I determined that believers seek *Imam* Husayn's shrine in order to achieve catharsis, salvation, and redemption. I have moreover established that these participants' struggles (personal and collective) are projected through their Imam's struggle against oppression and injustice. Finally, I have exemplified the central role gendered discourses play in Shi'ite narratives through the hanging silhouettes, and I represented through the same silhouettes, the drive by the U.S. administration to co-opt gender discourses in its campaign to rally support for its war on Iraq.

Chapter Three

The Third Room: Ritualization of Creative Practices as Sites of Resistance

From the entrance way of the third room, the recurring theme of journeying across space and time is evoked once again. The cyclical theme of maneuvering fluidly in between material objects which embody multiple histories, locales and interpretations across time and space are omnipresent throughout the entire exhibit (as established in the last two chapters), though it is particularly evident in the third room. In this Chapter, while escorting you through the third room as well as through the cityscape of Karbala, I will shed light on how the ritualization of creative practices by these women are locales for political and cultural resistance. The six hanging photographs throughout this room were placed in a manner to guide the movement of the audience, through both the physical space of the room and the past which is depicted through the photographs. The photographs are images of *'Ashura* rituals, installations, pilgrims and the city square of Karbala which I took during my trip to Karbala in 2004. Hence, the past (the Karbala narrative as it was ritualized and practiced in Karbala in 2004) is brought into the present (in the exhibit space and in the thesis).

In this chapter, I intend for the reader to be transported from 2006 to 2004 and from Cairo to Karbala, through a description of the contents of the photographs as they relate to the Karbala narratives as well as my own and that of the women's interpretations of the contents. I employ the Karbala narratives' ritualistic approach of transporting the audience across time and space (while collapsing time and space) to my own approach (in the exhibit and the thesis) which is based on and is a reflection of my state of in-

betweenness. Furthermore, I will demonstrate how the city square has been transformed by the local community into a site of resistance through reclaiming their cultural and religious practices, as well as, channeling them into a political movement.

The photographs in this room function as portals carrying bits and pieces of memories and narratives, to serve the purpose of personal and collective archives (my own and that of the women). Since these archives hold memories, they may be used as tools for healing and resistance as they represent narratives and creative practices of the community, the women and my own. The creative practice of constructing the exhibit (as a place for recovery and a material tool for resistance) is my attempt at reinterpreting and preserving a marginalized (that of Iraqi, Shi'a women and my own) culture and history from oblivion due to state oppression, wars, as well as neo-colonial and imperial projects which have resulted in the mass exodus of millions of Iraqis into the diasporas.

The creative practice of constructing the exhibit is not only a representation of my diasporic experiences and the women's stories; the installation itself is a manifestation of a quest for deciphering multiple histories and creative expressions in an attempt to smoothly interweave them to achieve salvation (not just for myself but to contribute through knowledge production by providing an innovative perspective and approach to dealing with trauma and healing). In this context, salvation is about attempting to make sense of the present dire conditions in Iraq and its consequences on its peoples (including the dispersion of it's populations into the diasporas).

Understanding these dismal conditions through creative expressions, such as art making and ritual, is not achieved only through verbal means as I have demonstrated in earlier chapters. Hence, I stress once again the use of non-verbal means to recover

memories and narratives through art and ritual to shed light onto past traumas (that of the Karbala narrative, Iraq, my family members and my own) in order to create a space for healing.

Contextualizing the Third Room

The State of In-betweenness of Transnationlist Communities

The mass migrations and "deterritorialization" of peoples through the processes of colonization, imperialism and globalization, have resulted in producing identity formations such as transnationalists and diasporic communities. The current stage of late capitalism has created a sense of "deterritorialization" for both transnational communities and nation states.[126] Prior to this moment, nation-states were strictly conceptualized as bounded territories that thrived on constructing common cultural, ethnic and/or linguistic identities. In contrast to the past, the process of "deterritorialization" is beginning to reconfigure old conceptualizations of nation-states and identities.

Basch, Glick-Schiller and Szanton-Blanc state that a "nation-state includes as citizens those who live physically dispersed within the boundaries of many other states, but who remain socially, politically, culturally, and often economically part of the nation-state of their ancestors."[127] As a result, diasporic and transnational communities, which construct new identity configurations that occupy a state of 'in-betweenness',[128] have emerged; and they exist in-between their varied and complex networks, locales, and cultures, and, thus, embody multiple and layered identities. Basch, Glick-Schiller and Szanton-Blanc add that "as transmigrants operate in the national arena of both their country of origin and country (or countries) of settlement, they develop new spheres of

experience and new fields of social relations. In their daily activities transmigrants connect nation-states and then live in a world shaped by the interconnections that they themselves have forged."[129]

One may argue that mass migrations between cultures have existed throughout history, but due to globalization and new technologies, such as fast and relatively affordable transportation, telecommunications, and economic transactions, these communities may now straddle multiple locales, cultures, languages and social, economic, political networks. These communities' interconnected social and political experiences and activities seem to extend across state boundaries constituting a single field of social relations.[130] Basch, Glick-Schiller and Szanton-Blanc maintain that "immigrants have multiple and complex networks that encompass more than just the United States [for example],"[131] since these communities use their established transnational networks to move between different nations. They define transnationalism as:

> (...) the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. Immigrants who develop and maintain multiple relationships – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political—that span borders we call "transmigrants." An essential element of transnationlism is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants' sustain in both home and host societies.[132]

Transnational paradigms can be perceived as contestations to homogenous constructions of the nation-state and the assumptions that identities, ethnicities, nationalism are fixed formation in time and space. Transnational communities possess fluid, varied, and complex identities. Their experiences and expressions provide insight into new configurations of social identity and space. Basch, Glick-Schiller and Szanton-

Blanc elaborate on their definition of transnationalism and these new arrangements of social identity and space. They state that the:

> Our definition of transnationalism allows us to analyze the "lived" and fluid experiences of individuals who act in ways that challenge our previous conflation of geographic space and social identity. This definition also will enable us to see the ways transmigrants are transformed by their transnational practices and how these practices affect the nation-nation-states of the transmigrants' origin and settlement.[133]

Inderpal Grewal's work is informed by diaspora studies that address the "heterogeneity of many national and cultural formations."[134] Such a theoretical shift contrasts with migration theories, which dealt with the movement of populations from "home" country to a "host" country and the assimilation of people into their new cultural identity. James Clifford elaborates on the diasporic dimensions of transnationalist communities, whose practices and cultures are a product of displacement. He argues that both diasporic and transnationalist communities share a similar state of displacement, "constructing home away from home", memories of and longing for home, but the difference is based on the notion of returning to the homeland.[135] Clifford also provides a comparison between borderlands and diaspora:

> (...) borderlands are distinct in that they presuppose a territory defined by a geo-political line: two sides arbitrarily separated and policed, but also joined by legal and illegal practices of crossing and communication. Diasporas usually presuppose longer distances and a separation more like exile: a constitutive taboo on return, or its postponement to a remote future. Diasporas also connect multiple communities of a dispersed population. Systematic border crossings may be part of this interconnection, but multi-locale diaspor[ic] cultures are not necessarily defined by a specific geopolitical boundary. It is worth holding onto the historical and geographical specificity of the two paradigms, while recognizing that the concrete predicaments denoted by the terms *border* and *diaspora* bleed into one another.[136]

Most scholars on Diaspora agree that the notion of "homeland" and displacement play a central role in the collective memory of diasporic communities. Robin Cohen defines diasporas as a perpetual state of exile and banishment from the homeland, resulting in a collective trauma. He explains that diasporas differ from transmigrants since they might imagine home, but only live in exile.[137]

William Safran offers a very rigid definition based on authenticity tests according to a defining "ideal model" which he provides. Evidence suggests (according to James Clifford, Stuart Hall and others) that such strict definitions based on "ideal models" are problematic, restrictive and does not take into account *this* transnational moment. In his essay "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return", Safran defines diaspora through six main criteria: 1) "expatriate minority communities" who have been dispersed from a specific "center" into at least two "peripheral" places; 2) they maintain a shared "memory, vision, or myth" about their homeland; 3) they believe they cannot "fully be accepted by the host country"; 4) they regard the homeland as the ideal place to return to once they can; 5) they are committed to the "maintenance or restoration of this homeland"; 6) they remain connected to the homeland and their "ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship."[138]

Stuart Hall provides a different definition of diaspora which is not necessarily based on a physical return to a homeland, but rather a metaphorical one. He argues that the "old" definition of diaspora is problematic since it was based on a need to secure an identity vis-à-vis a return to a homeland at all costs. Hall suggests that the notion of return to a homeland at the expense of others is the:

> (...) imperialising, the hegemonising, form of 'ethnicity'. We have seen the fate of the people of Palestine at the hands of this backward-looking conception of diaspora- and the complicity of the West with it. The diaspora experience (...) is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and thorough, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*.[139]

Hall suggests that the return to a nostalgic past or to a lost origin cannot be performed other then symbolically through creative representations and narratives.[140] He argues that diasporic identities are "constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through

transformation and difference."[141] Hence, these communities are producing a "diasporic aesthetic" which is contributing to, and shaping, our understanding of this post-colonial period.[142] As quoted by Grewal, Hall suggests that through such cultural recovery practices coherence could be produced out of an experience marked by "dispersion and fragmentation which is the history of all enforced diasporas."[143]

Khachig Tölölyan in his essay "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment" suggests that it is critical to define diaspora as a "collectivity rather than a scattering of individuals."[144] He suggests that it is not enough for diasporic individuals to have identities which are different from those of the dominant host country, but they must also have "diasporic-specific social identities that are constructed through interaction with the norms, values, discourses and practices of the diaspora's communal institutions, honoring some and transgressing others."[145]

Avtar Brah provides a comprehensive understanding of the term diaspora, where both endogenous and migrants co-inhabit the same space. Brah explains that diasporas also share the same sense of fluidity and a "shifting experience of place and space." Brah's notion of diaspora "places the discourse of 'home' and 'dispersion' in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourse of fixed origins."[146]

Women's Creative Productions of Transnational Communities

Cultural productions of transnational and diasporic communities are constructed through creative practices, such as visual art, music, performance, film, and other artistic expressions. These communities' creative practices are a reflection of their lived

experiences, struggles, and are a representation of the "underlying social relations and structures" they inhabit.[147] Through their creative practices, transnational women embark upon a journey of constructing their identities, in which they may contest preconceived identities placed on them by the larger society. Laura Lengel highlights the specificity of women's transnational experience stating that transnational women may "create, contest, uphold or shift cultural identity through dance, music, and other performing arts."[148] At the same time, while these artistic expressions may reflect their existing identities, they may also construct new ones. Hence, transnational and diasporic women's creative practices are, in essence, a production of their identities.

In his exploration of the complexity of identity, Stuart Hall states that:

> (...) identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a "production," which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.[149]

Similarly, such women's performance, and other forms of verbal and non-verbal expressions, can be understood as productions and manifestations of their own identities, which are constantly shifting and incessantly fluid. However, their identities are not mere products but continuous processes, as their identity formations are—in their own turn—questioning and redefining homogenous constructions of identity, which assume the identities of the marginalized to be formations that are fixed in time and space. In this sense, their practices are subjective; they are also an expression of their complex and varied experiences. Their creative practices allow for a certain fluidity of agency and self-representation, which are a reflection of their often marginalized positions in society.

Creative Practices as Sites of Resistance

Transnational women sometimes utilize creative expressions to contest racial, ethnic, gender, class, and other forms of obstacles they might encounter in the societies they interact with. Creative practices by these women may be comprehended as a non-threatening mode of communication that "transcends the linguistic, social, and political boundaries that can limit traditional communication and thus offer new possibilities for exchange across cultures."[150] These women are also confronting the dominant structures and expressions of the societies they live in. Laura Lengel employs the 'Dance Brigade'--a dance troupe—as an example of how creative practices may be used as a tool for resistance; "Using dominant cultural products in a subversive way, the dancers shift interpretations and allow their audiences to negotiate their own meanings. The dancers' creative practice can transform social order, resist cultural hegemony, and bridge differences between communities."[151] These women are engaging in producing a counter culture since they provide the audience with alternative voices, visions, and trajectories that are inaccessible to the larger public. Transnational women are also engaging in creative practices to reclaim their own histories, memories, and cultural identities, which are marginalized. By employing alternative modes of communication to address their struggles and complexity, these women create a space for themselves to heal, and for others to begin their own healing process. Thus, these women have initiated a collaborative and transformative process for communities to comprehend, absorb, and take pride in their complex, hybrid, and fluid identities.

An Overview of the Third Room

The third room is an involved maze like arrangement of the six, enlarged, glass framed photographs dangling from the ceiling (Refer to Figure I.5 Third Room). The audience were required to maneuver cautiously in between the swinging photographs. After mindfully and successfully passing in between the dangling glass framed photographs, the audience came to a standstill as they encountered twelve photographs enclosed within boxed frames (see Figure I.12. Boxed Photographs). These frames were arranged closely to each other in order to resemble a large black coffin. The black boxed frames seized the same photographs in the dangling frames of Karbala and *'Ashura* of the 2004 trip. The dark, fixed framed photographs placed inside the black boxed coffin were set in contrast to the dangling, flowing, luminescent photographs. Through a simulated experience for the audience, I wanted to highlight the process of transformation and salvation achieved by pilgrims on their journeys. I also shed light on how spaces (Karbala and the installation) and the ritualization of creative practices (as experienced by the women) are sites of resistance.

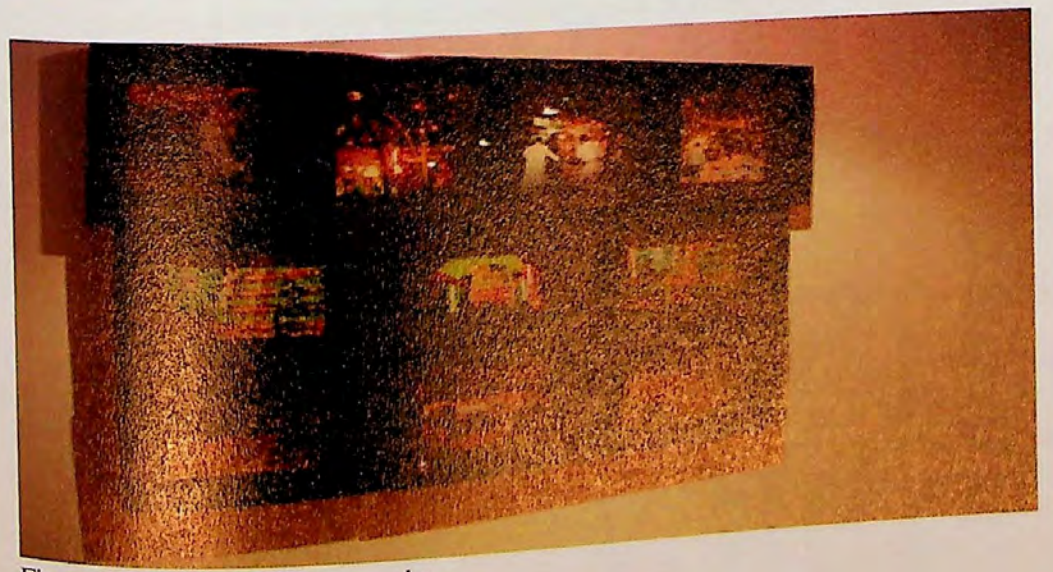


Figure I.12. Boxed Photographs.

The photographs depicted in this room were shot the first night I arrived in Karbala. That night, I had no intention of shooting footage that I was going to present publicly. It was the first time for me to take photographs at night; hence my intention was to shoot leisurely. Since the material was stolen, I had to retrieve and relay the interviews and my experiences from memory. The process of retrieving and relaying these memories proved to be more challenging then I expected, nevertheless the process proved to be emblematic of my project; since the project itself aims to reconstruct traumatic memories into narratives (both textual and visual) in order to reclaim marginalized histories, while at the same time framing them into a political/cultural resistance framework (the Shi'ite narrative and my own is based on this reconstruction). Selma Leydesdorff, Luisa Passerini, and Paul Thompson provide a parallel approach to oral and women's history in Eastern Europe and Latin America:

> (...) women's history in Eastern Europe is operating today in the frame of 'heroes' and 'martyrs' precisely because the contrast it provides with an official history, which from war memorials to school textbooks has been dominated by men, helps in the construction of a basis for cultural resistance. The situation is very much parallel to that of much of the more abundant-and also more diverse-oral history more generally in Latin America, where partly because of the failure of the effective paths to change through institutional politics, history becomes in itself a vital field of every-day political struggle.[152]

Relaying information from memory in order to turn them into narratives proved to be a cathartic process for me. Since the process of constructing the exhibit, writing and thinking through the material, served to lay the ground for creating an unconventional historiography on narratives of war and displacement. Hence, I induce the sacred through out the installation as a means to interpret narratives based on memories of tragic events such as the Karbala narratives as well as war and dislocation (my own memories and

those of female members of my family). By doing so, I provide a multidimensional approach (the installation and thesis) which aims to archiving these historical events while reconstructing and exhibiting them. I also attempt to offer the audience and the reader an experiential as well as a personal perspective towards interacting with the subject matter. Finally, I present a methodological approach towards healing through narratives, memories and the creative practices.

I evoke Zaynab's oratory ability of transmitting the Karbala narratives from memory (which I discussed in the last two chapters) as representational of this historical tradition within the community, such as the *Mullayah* and *Radoud* utilizing oral traditions as tools for instituting cultural resistance, political and religious struggle. The *Radoud* and *Mullayah* are examples of these traditions which are based on remembrance and oral narratives in order to commemorate tragic events which interweave the past and the present while aspiring healing and salvation.

Selma Leydesdorff suggests that "In short, narration and remembrance play an important role in the creation of new collective identities and civil society. There are several projects that encourage refugee women to talk about fleeing; they experience this act of talking about the past as a step towards overcoming their trauma (Archives of Memory 2001)."[153] By narrating and interweaving all these histories, through both the visual installation and the thesis, I am not only undertaking an experiential approach to historiography but also attempting to map out emerging collective diasporic identities which are transnationalist in orientation. By doing so, I offer an innovative approach to conveying and healing the past in relationship to the present in the hopes for overcoming both personal and collective traumas due to wars, dislocation and marginalization. Hence,

by constructing a journey into *'Ashura* as ritual and art, I hope to transport the audience and the reader across time and space to explore the notion of collective traumas while offering salvation through a broader interpretation of the sacred.

By inviting the audience to navigate fluidly among the material objects (such as the hanging photographs) until they reach a fixed locale (such as the fixed photographs), I am creating a setting parallel to the processes of sacred journeying perused by pilgrims. The pilgrims navigate through space to reach a specific fixed locale (leaving home-arriving to the holy city of Karbala and shrines-going back home) while participating in various rituals. The process itself (the movement and rituals) aims toward resolution, salvation and transcendence of material or spiritual quests. Alan Morinis suggest that means to the pilgrimage progression:

> (...) is the movement between (...) two poles. Pilgrimage mediates the opposition between them and permits various sorts of resolution. The pilgrim is a cursor that shifts from problem to answer, in the hope of working a mediation and resolution between the imperfection he knows and the ideal he seeks.
> Movement (physical or otherwise) is inherent in the transcendence of constraints. Most commonly, movement by the pilgrim links two static poles: the fixed place of home and the fixed place of the ideal. This pattern takes advantage of the power of movement to join the poles by crossing the gulf that separates them. This pattern is not universal in pilgrimage because not all homes are static (...), nor all deities fixed in space (...). In every case, movement is employed in pilgrimage to represent the route of transformation toward perfection, but there is no inherent rule that this mediation take the form of stasis-movement-stasis.[154]

The locales, such as the shrine in Chapter and Room two, or the fixed photographs in Chapter and Room three, are the thresholds which are instrumental to transcending limitations while reaching towards the divine. The locales can be viewed as outward journeys or inward meditations for the pilgrims and the audience in the installation.

In his exploration of pilgrimage center, Victor Turner sheds light on them as representational of "thresholds", metaphorical of the transformational power of the sacred experience:

> A pilgrimage center, from the standpoint of the believing actor, also represents a threshold, a place and moment "in and out of time," and such an actor-as the evidence of many pilgrims of many religions attests-hopes to have there direct experience of the sacred, invisible or supernatural order, either in the material aspect of miraculous healing or in the immaterial aspect of inward transformation of spirit or personality.[155]

Hence, similar to a journey taken by pilgrims, I invite the audience in the third room to travel in between the dangling photographs until they reach the fixed photographs set against the back wall. The hanging photographs resemble the movement of the outward journey. While the fixed photographs set inside shadow boxes require the audience to move up close to the boxes in order to examine the photographs. I purposely set these photographs inside the boxed frames in order to suggest a sense of depth and introspection which is similar to the processes undertaken by pilgrims in their inward journey. Hence, the fixed locale signifies the inward journey undertaken by pilgrims as well as participants.

The process of journeying in the third room is meant to hint at the link of the present to past. The 'present' moment of the audience moving through the room while performing a simulated pilgrimage, as well as viewing the photographs, provide a glimpse into the past: Karbala in 2004 as well as commemorations of a past event (the battle of Karbala in 680 A.D.), which all emphasize that the past is present now. Alan Morinis eloquently describes the linkage between the past and present during the experience of a pilgrimage:

> Many of these examples are concerned with the connection of present to the past, but by so doing or by more explicitly asserting that the past is now, too, all time is collapsed into an eternal moment in which perfection overcomes the incompleteness of mundane lived time. This is salvation. (...) Salvation can be either the total transformation attained through transcendence or the more piece-meal earthly acquisition of solutions to the powerlessness, discomfort, and weakness of an afflicted life. Pilgrimage is inclined to vows and promises because solutions to the seemingly insurmountable difficulties that motivate a scared journey must come from a higher order of power.[156]

For the pilgrims, the process of collapsing time and space is geared towards salvation. In the case of my installation, the past is brought into the present through the participants viewing the photographs in this room. I utilize the collapsing of time and space by bringing the past into the present throughout the installation spaces.

The Hanging Photographs

I arranged the suspended photographs in a way so that members of the audience are able to see each one separately from the front of the room (I had to work with the gallery director, assistant and five interns to make sure this was accomplished as they all attested to it). Even though some of the glass framed photographs overlapped with each other, the audience members were able to have visible access to each one separately, since they could see through the glass frames which were 5cm x 5cm larger then the photographs which were to the dimensions of 40cm x 50cm. The dangling framed photographs hung by fishing wires from the ceiling. The suspended glass framed photographs were not fixed; they swayed side to side or front to back if one bumped into them. I purposefully suspended them in that manner since I wanted the audience to be aware of their surroundings and conscious of their movement as they maneuvered around the photographs and through the room. The gallery director and the coordinator thought the arrangement of the framed photographs did accomplish the task of forcing the audience members to be aware of their surrounding since if they did not, they would bump into the glass frames.

The rhythm of the *Radoud*'s chanting and the beats of the *latm* which infused the surroundings set the mood and pace of the audience's movement in the third room. The

somber yet passionate tone of the chant and *latm* induced a meditative mood while slowly stirring the audience to the rhythmic and repetitive tempo as they journeyed throughout the room. Tarek Al-Akkad elaborates on the experience of the rooms: "The overall feel was like meditating in a place of worship."[157] The hanging photographs offered the illusion of swinging to the same rhythmic tempo which enhanced the overall effect.

The audience's movements shed a glimpse of light on how pilgrims may experience these rhythmic rituals and their psychosomatic sensations, "those who behold them embrace them as though the actual body, applying all their senses, eyes, mouth and ears; then they pour forth tears for his (Husayn) piety and suffering, and bring forward their supplications to the martyr as though he were present and complete."[158] Through rhythmically ritualized physical movements, the pilgrim's senses become instrumental in materializing the pain and sentiments in order for them to reach an elevated state towards their journey to salvation. Hence, the chanting paces the pilgrim's movement during *latm,* while the heartbreaking eulogies and poignant melodies emotionally move them to weep. Through these processes, the pilgrims gradually begin to embody the pain and suffering of Husayn and *ahl-al-bayt* while injecting their own personal sorrows and afflictions until they reach a heightened state of frenzy. By engaging in this manner, the pilgrims hope to achieve catharsis and reach salvation through their intercessor (*Imam* Husayn).

The hanging photographs were positioned in between glass frames which were held together by a thin, black wooden frame. I placed two photographs in each frame, one in the front and the other in the back, in order for the audience to encounter different sets of images on their way into the room and as they make their way out. The audience were able to see through the glass frames the other dangling photographs as well as the coffin

shaped framed photographs on the back wall as indicated by several members. Light fixtures were aimed at the hanging photographs which resulted in light reflecting off the glass frames. Hence, the glass-framed photographs appeared translucent and gave the effect of omitting light. I printed the photographs on metallic paper which had a reflective and shining element. Thus, the metallic paper enhanced the luminous images in the photographs, since most of them depicted light installations constructed by community members for the month of *Muharram*. As a consequence, the metallic photographs, glass frames and lighting presented a halo-like effect which invoked the sacred. Since the sacred in many religious/cultural aesthetic and iconographic traditions, including Shi'a visual imagery, evokes light and halos around what it deems as revered, I purposefully induced the corona-like effect emitted from the hanging photographs in order to emulate the nimbus around the images of the posters of the *Imams* ('Ali and Husayn) portrayed in my photographs (refer to page 82: 'Projected Photograph: Gendered Silhouettes' for a description of the contents of this specific photograph).

These and other installations depicted in the photographs were temporarily assembled in commemoration of *'Ashura* to create a religious space. Hence, similar to my own installation, these highly structured and crafted public installations seen around the cityscape of Karbala are temporarily displayed and are dismantled after the memorials come to an end. Ingvild Flaskerud proposes that:

> All the locations in (...) were temporary religious spaces. They were decorated and prepared for visitors on specific days when rituals were being held, and the ritual space thus had to be created anew for each occasion. Visual expressions such as pictures, sculptures, and architectural forms are often used to create religious space. Mosques can be decorated with ornaments and calligraphy, readily interpreted to reflect the doctrine of God's oneness, *towhid*. Such an-iconic decorations do not have any liturgical relevance in rituals, but are used to create a space in which worshippers can transcend their daily existence and focus verbal prayer toward a God who should not be visually represented except in symbolic form. Visual images applied to Moharram and Safar rituals seem to have s similar function as that of ornament and calligraphy. However, they were also intended to connect worshippers to

> historical figures to whom they should express sympathy and allegiance. It was therefore important that iconographic and verbal language of visual imagery refer to these persons, be it the Prophet Mohammed, Imam Ali, Imam Hosayn, Abu al-Fazl Abbas, or others, reminding worshippers of the role of these persons and aiding them in mourning.[159]

The installations represented in my photographs are yet another form of creative and aesthetic expressions developed by community members to create religious spaces in order to tap into pilgrim's senses. The aim is to transcend their daily struggles in order to express their sorrows and allegiances towards *ahl-al-bayt* who are the vehicles towards their salvation and communion with God.

As illustrated in one of the hanging photographs, four men wearing white *dishdashas* (long men's robes) set in motion towards the city square pushing forth a cart which supports a miniature golden shrine. The three tiered shrine replica was ornately decorated with mirrors, lanterns, colorful flowers, tassels and incense by the craftsmen in order to aesthetically express their homage (for the *Imam* and the revered month) as well as to arouse the pilgrims' senses. I recall taking the photograph vigorously of the dazzling scene as the four men swiftly strolled by me. They suddenly disappeared into the crowded streets, leaving behind them a trail of sweet scented incense and heavenly fragranced flowers which penetrated through out the surrounding atmosphere. The bright and glowing spectacle stood out against the darkness of the night and the splendid whiteness of their robes (See Figure I.13. Men pushing cart supporting miniature golden shrine).

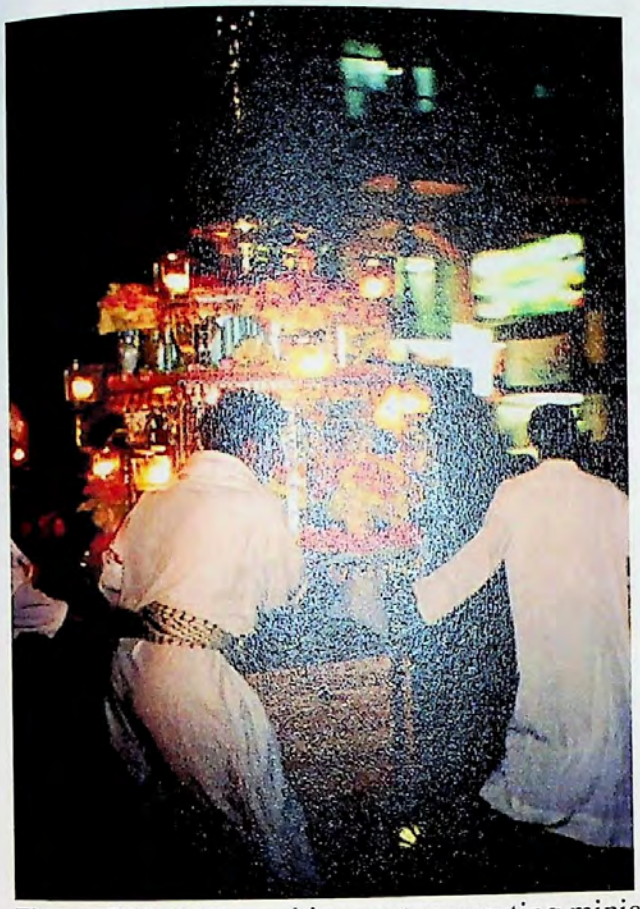


Figure I.13. Men pushing cart supporting miniature golden shrine.

As the four men later approached the city square, they raised the ornamented shrine from the cart and placed it on each of their shoulders. They began to tour the city square with the symbolic memorial as a sign of tribute to the *Imams*. The model shrine is an example of how the community constructs a visual expression of religious and cultural spaces (both physical and otherwise, such as manufacturing a mood). It is through this world of sight, sound and smell, that a pilgrim is able to individualize the experience and cross time and space (the Karbala battle field in 680 A.D.) in order to tap into an emotionally charged space so she/he can connect with the pain and suffering (both of their own and that of *ahl-al-bayt's*). Alan Morinis suggests that:

> The symbolism of the pilgrimage and the symbols that are integrated into the sacred journey and center are all features of culture. More generally, here we find what can be called the code of pilgrimage, which underlies the concept and practice of pilgrimage within a culture.

> Through song, art, narrative, drama, and so on, this code conveys messages about the relative importance of pilgrimage as a personal practice, the schemes of levels of sacred sites with the culture, and the semantic linkages of pilgrimage with other cultural categories.[160]

Hence, the replicated shrine is linked to cultural codes which are manifested through the rituals during the pilgrimage. The transportable shrine may be viewed as a portal for these men to manifest their own pilgrimage. These men are not only honoring the *Imams* and tapping into pilgrims' senses through aesthetic expressions; by carrying the portable shrine through the town while reciting Husayn eulogies, they are in fact engaging in a psychosomatic expression which may be able to bring them closer to the divine. This somatic illustration is similar to the Shi'i tradition of demonstrating sorrow and grief through enduring hardship (physical, mental and emotional) in order to show commitment to the cause and sympathy for *ahl-al-bayt.* The somatic and spatial demonstration through the city square may be seen as a manifestation of the men's spiritual quest and a symbol of their movement through different levels of transcendence.

The Coffin-Shaped Framed Photographs

The coffin-shaped structure was made up of four horizontal and three vertical small black boxed frames which carried the same photographs of Karbala and *'Ashura* (See Figure I.12). Each boxed frame, which is to the dimensions of approximately 30cm x 40cm, were precisely placed next to each other. The tight placement of the boxed frames was implemented in order to provide an impression of a large coffin-shaped structure. The structure resembled, both in metaphor and form, the shrine in the second room and the five coffins in the first room (refer to Chapter Two for an analysis of the meaning of *Maqam).* After journeying in-between the hanging photographs, passing each one fleetly, audience members were faced with the momentous structure. The weighty

construction required from the audience to stand still in front of it and look carefully inside in order to view the photographs which were placed within each boxed frame. Huda Lutfi (a professor of Arabic Studies and a visual artist) commented on her encounter with the placement of the photographs:

> The photos were intriguing, they were a documentation of the festivities but in small size, and I felt one has to come really close to get into the events that you were trying to catch through your camera. The 3-dimensional structure itself attracted the focus of the visitor. The color black and the idea that this is a tomb, the whole installation: photos, structure and lighting played on the feelings of the viewer, that one is entering a sacred space.[161]

Hence, the main purpose of the grave fixed composition on the back wall was to remind the audience of the inward and reflective stage a pilgrimage may reach after a long traveled journey. As well as, the external (materiel) and internal (spiritual) struggle a pilgrim has to undergo in order to reach their quest.

The City Square

The third room in my installation is in a sense a composition of what I witnessed and heard while accompanied by my cousins Lubna and Luma in the Karbala city square during *'Ashura* festivities in 2004. As we walked through the city square, I experienced the fluid movement of walking through the space and in between the varied installations which resembled the outward journey practiced by pilgrims, while halting at each station reflected the quest for the fixed meditative inward journey. Hence, I reconstructed those journeys in the third room by using the metaphors of the hanging and fixed photographs. The city square is the quintessential area to explore these journeys; while the creative performances and aesthetic expressions practiced by community members are the portals for those journeys.

As Lubna, Luma and I approached one of the main streets that lead to the city square; we encountered a *Shabih* (consoling imitation) procession. This specific

procession depicted Qasem who is the son of Husayn's elder brother Hassan. Qasem was promised to Fatemeh who is Husayn's daughter. They were both in their teens at the time, but since their death was imminent at the battle of Karbala, Husayn decided to marry them off. After the wedding ceremonies and just before they consummated their marriage, Qassem was called upon to set off to the battlefield. Qassem fought heroically against the ruthless army until he met his brutal demise.[162] Qassem's account is one of the prominent narratives in the Karbala tale and is expressly employed throughout the *'Ashura* commemorations. Qasem and Fatemeh's doomed romance is conjured up to render the audience to sob in pity and compassion. The young lad and his young widowed bride became a symbol of purity and integrity since he became a martyr before they were able to consummate their wedding. His bloody slaying is recounted throughout the processions in order to move the audience to tears since he was a youthful and innocent lad.

Peter J. Chelkowski depicts one of the *Shabih* processions he encountered in Iran which is similar in representation to the ones enacted in Iraq:

> While Ali Akbar, the elder son of Hussen, is singlehandedly fighting off the attacker's army (the fight is not staged, but is referred to) both actors and spectators make preparations for the wedding on the central stage in the area surrounding it. Finally they bring in the colorfully beribboned nuptial tent and lead the bride and bridegroom through one of the pit corridors to it. Festive wedding music accompanies their march. Cookies are joyfully passed among the audience. Then suddenly, from behind the audience, the horse of Ali Akbar appears. It is riderless. At this sign of Ali Akbar's death, everyone in the *takiyeh* (arena theaters built by community members as a religious and public service) freezes into position. Qasem leaves the main stage and rushed into the battlefield behind the audience. Almost immediately he returns, leading the procession that carries the body of Ali Akbar, raised high on shields, to the central stage. As it is the custom of Muslim countries for the entire community to participate in the last rites of the dead, the whole audience rises to its feet and weeps. Since it is also customary during the funeral processions that everyone should strive to help carry the coffin, those of the audience who cannot push close enough stretch their hands in symbolic gestures.
> Finally, the body is laid on the main stage opposite the nuptial tent. On one side of the stage, funeral rites are performed with interludes of mournful music. The spectators dishevel their hair and beat their breasts. On the other side of the stage, the wedding ceremony continues accompanied by jubilant music. There is a cacophony of sound, the audience turning from side to side changing from weeping to laughter.

> When the marriage rites are concluded and Qasem is preparing to consummate the marriage, he is called to the battlefield. First he attacks the young sons of the besieging generals who, at the sight of the gallant son of Hassan, flee in a comical manner. Then at last he must fight the whole army and is slain.[163]

The *Shabih* in the procession I witnessed depicted Qasim as a young teenager bearing a warrior's metallic uniform coating his white bridegroom costume. A large grey feather adorned his silver helmet which rested on top of his green headdress. The elaborately adorned *Shabih* was atop a white horse decorated for the wedding ceremony marching into the city square with the procession behind them. One of Bassem Al-Karbalai's eulogies describes in details Qasim's heartbreaking downfall which can be heard through out the installation rooms.

As we followed the procession we encountered numerous highly structured installations lining up the street leading into the city square. One of these installations I describe in detail on page 82 (refer to the section titled 'Projected Photograph: Gendered Silhouettes' for a description of the contents of this specific photograph). Similarly, we came across another comparable installation constructed by community members (See Figure I.14. Installation). As depicted in the photograph, this specific outdoor installation is also a towering multi-tiered glass facade structure ornamented by lavish multicolored lanterns (*lale`*) framed by bright neon lights. The antique lanterns are multihued tall crystal fixtures encircled by intricate engravings. The dazzling light spectacle is magnified by the reflections of the vibrant lanterns in the background mirrors. Colorful vases enveloping red, yellow and orange flowers are scattered throughout the light installation. The lantern display is enclosed within a semi-room, hence, providing frontal access for public viewing. Brilliant neon lights decorate the borders of the partial room, while green fabric cover up the interior walls. On one of the side walls, bright neon lights

are circularly placed against the green backdrop. A bouquet of colorful flowers is arranged in the center of the wheel shaped neon light formation. Beneath the circular light arrangement, a poster of *Imam* Husayn draped in a green shawl rests against the green wall. His image emanates light due to the reflections of the lights on the glass frame of the poster.

Figure I.14. Installation.

Across the main installation, a large round tray rests on the floor. Multicolored lit candles adorn the henna-based plate. The *Radoud*'s mesmerizing voice and eulogies captivate the passersby from afar. A green railing surrounds the light spectacle which is adorned by a golden miniature replica of Husayn's shrine. In the photograph, a man wearing a black *dishdasha* and head dress as symbols of mourning for the slain *Imam* is seen approaching the installation. He is probably one of the community members who participated in constructing this involved light exhibition as a tribute for the *Imam* and in commemoration of *'Ashura* since he is seen behind the green barrier. The creative installation is yet another example of Iraqi Shi'ite aesthetic traditions.

My cousins and I moved along to a nearby multi-video and TV installations. We found rows of elevated wooden structures seizing bulky TV screens and videos. Each TV

screen aired *'Ashura* commemorations around the world. Most of them depicted men performing *latm* (chest beating). I found this specific installation intriguing since it provided access of public *'Ashura* commemorations around the world to a local community which most likely has not had the privilege to view such documentation. Hence, the installation served to expand the reach of the commemorations and the community, since the installation severed to connect the locals to a transnational Shi'a community thus providing a sense of a collective Shi'a identity.

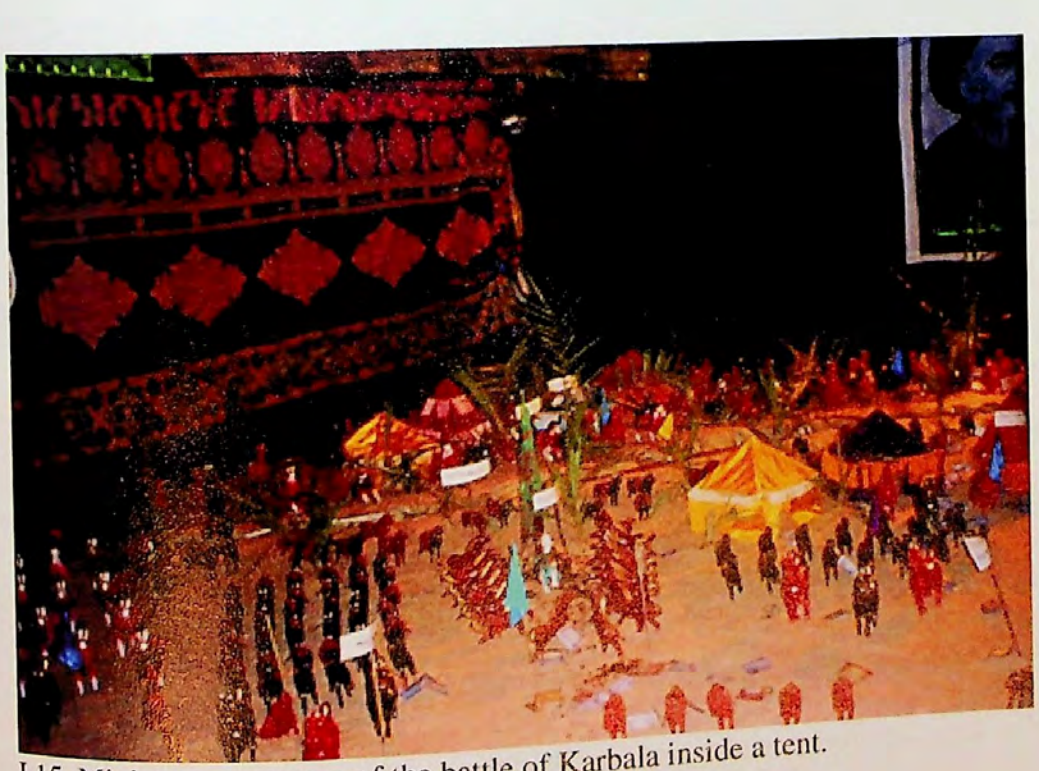
As we moved along we came across numerous other sophisticated installations and multifaceted performances until we reached the city square. A young girl's voice amplified through a microphone captured us from a distance. The three of us turned towards the angelic voice in the center of the square. A young girl draped in black from head to toe stood in the center of a circle formed by people surrounding her. She was accompanied by her elder father and her little brother in the center. Her brother was carrying the amplifiers while her father was mentoring her while she recited saintly eulogies. She would look up from time to time at her father's eyes for assurance while glancing swiftly at the audience for approval. It was a sight to be remembered. Her majestic voice captivated the audience, while the tender performative eulogies moved the spectators to tears. Her recitations of the narratives were linguistically and vocally imaginative, though I noticed that her intonation and enunciation was distinctive. She had a Farsi accent; hence she and her family must have been pilgrims from Iran coming to visit the holy city. The crowds around the youth began to disperse as soon as she completed her performance. I can not recall if she and her family were asking for

donations; either way, her tribute to *ahl-al-bayt* and recitations of the Karbala narrative is considered to be a *thawab* (merited).

The three of us began walking towards *Imam* Husayn's bejeweled golden dome and multihued turquoise shrine. The outside walls of the shrine were temporarily (for the period of *Muharram*) decorated with large-scale creative commemorative wall-hangings, posters and murals. The vivid figurative images depicted various scenes from the epical battle of Karbala, though most of them illustrated *Imam* Husayn's heroic struggle and martyrdom. The three of us were instantly drawn to the loud rhythmic drum beats emanating from the large tents encircling the shrine. We entered into one of the tents where we stumbled upon a spectacular multi sensory sight. We came across a group of men dressed in black *dishdashas* and head dresses who were rhythmically pounding bulky drums attached to their bodies by a rope. At the same time several other men performed *latm* to the rhythms of the austere drum beats. The men engaged in a moving call and response musical dialogue as they chanted loudly yet harmoniously Husayn eulogies.

Behind the men an intricate installation extended on the floor coating the entire tent space. The installation was an elaborate miniature panorama of the battle of Karbala (See Figure I.15. Miniature panorama of the battle of Karbala inside a tent). The ground of the reproduced battlefield was coated with sand decorated arbitrary by branches of palm trees. Colorful tents and flags symbolizing the Umayyad Army Camp ground were domineeringly represented. Minuscule black and red horses representing the Umayyad Army surrounded a lone blood-spattered white horse wrapped in green representing *Imam* Husayn's horse and the *Imam's* bloody and inequitable massacre. Behind the horse

a blood-spattered green flag reigned in the background. Nearby, another scene depicted a bloody pool surrounded by golden helmets and blood-spattered white horses illustrating the brutal beheading of male members of *ahl-al-bayt* (See Figure I.16. A depiction of the bloody beheading of Imam Husayn). Next to the horses and helmets a white banner with Arabic text was placed which indicate the slain martyrs. The dramatic scene was compounded by the men's penetrating chanting and drumming which reverberated throughout the enclosed area. One by one the men lined up in a row and began to evacuate the tent. Shortly afterwards we followed them outside into the open air showground.



I.15. Miniature panorama of the battle of Karbala inside a tent.

Figure I.16. A depiction of the bloody beheading of Imam Husayn.

Later, when I relayed to my mother what I experienced and saw during the celebrations, she began to remember her childhood memories of *'Ashura's* ornamental celebrations. She was surprised when I told her about the relics used during the commemorations since some were antique artifacts. She claimed that most likely the ornate memorabilia used during the celebrations were unearthed by community members from their basements and storage places. She alleged that perhaps these artifacts were kept hidden for decades by community members who feared their confiscation by the authorities. My mother reminisced over her childhood encounters with the old processions where people dressed in black and carried candles while softly weeping as they made their way slowly through the former narrow, tall and dark alleyways of Karbala. She asserted that those processions were more dramatic and moving then the new ones since the architecture of the maze-like city with its small, dim and constricted

long alleyways were conducive to reproducing the dark nature and mood of the processions.

Um Mohammed asserted that these aesthetic expressions and emotive performances (such as the installations, the *Shabih*, the young girl, the processions, the four men in the tent, etc... described above) are all examples of how members of the community utilize these creative practices to create the desirable spiritual space and emotional mood in order to express their sorrow and allegiance to *ahl-al-bayt*. She also claims that these commemorations are signs of remorse, shame and repentance by the participants since they regret not being there at the time of the battle to rescue members of *ahl-al-bayt* and fight alongside Husayn. According to *Um* 'Ali, in doing so, they hope that their intercessors will hear their plight and act as their intercessors to God. Ingvild Flaskerud proposes that:

> Aesthetics is applied to create the necessary and desirable religious space, creating an emotional environment that can aid participants to mentally cross the threshold of everyday life to participate in mourning rituals. Moreover, the interactive character of poetry recitation provides worshippers with a method for actively expressing sorrow and allegiance to Imam Hosayn and his family. Thus by becoming active performers of lamentation poems, participants conduct a meritorious act, *savab,* which hopefully works to their advantage on the Day of Judgment and promotes their chances of being helped by holy intercession in this life. Constructing ritual objects is likewise perceived as meritorious. Ritual objects and visual imagery are also perceived as suitable offerings (ex-votos), *nazer*, in a prayer-for-help that has been granted by holy mediators. These gifts are believed to transmit blessing, *tabarrok*, to those who come in contact with them. Aesthetics can thus be seen to function as a channel for addressing God's mediators, supporting verbal prayers and supplicants. It can also be seen as a channel for mediating intercession, by spreading God's blessing and grace in the community of believers.[164]

As explained in earlier chapters and as expressed by *Um* Muhammed, these artistic practices are also utilized to manifest creative outlets for the community to deal with its own hardships and struggles. She asserts that through these imaginative endeavors individuals are able to transcend their own troubles by projecting their own pain and suffering into the calamity of the Karbala narratives. Ingvild Flaskerud suggests that:

> (...) art, as symbol, can act as a bridge between a familiar reality and one that transcends ordinary expression. (...) which symbols to apply and approach seemed to be dependent on several criteria, such as how efficiently they could create a mourning mood and how they related to worshipper's life experience and their relation to particular holy persons. (...) The function of aesthetics in mourning meetings were thus directly related to Shi'i Islamic martyrology and its promise of redemption and intercession. Aesthetics became a necessary instrument functioning as medium or channel for communicating with the spiritual realm.[165]

Hence, according to Flaskerud and *Um* Muhammed these inventive outlets are portals for pilgrims to cross time and space (the meta-historical plane of Karbala) in order for them to connect to a higher plane which provides them with comfort, sympathy and renders their own pain and suffering minuscule compared to this mega-catastrophe. *Um* Muhammed further declares that these creative practices are sites of resistance since through these expressions the community is able to narrate the tragedy of the Karbala narrative as the ultimate injustice done, while injecting their own specific oppressions.

I was impressed with the surrounding intricate aesthetic and creative inventions. At the same time, I was amazed by the security enforced by community members and the organization of all details throughout the city center; tents were set up for foreign pilgrims who needed shelter around the city center, food and drinks were distributed to passers by at each corner, emergency stations were arranged throughout the square, while tight security was enforced systematically. I recall filming the bombed setting a day after the nine explosions, when two local security volunteers approached me and began interrogating me about my reasons for filming and who I was. Our interactions escalated until they decided to take me in to the main security headquarters where I waited to see their higher up. As time passed waiting for the security official, the situation became very heated. Luckily the dynamic shifted once the official in charge showed up. In contrast to the civic security men, the officer was very sympathetic and cooperative. Fortunately I had footage on my DVD of an interview with one of the main political leaders in the

community which I shared with the official in order to provide legitimacy for my case. In response, he apologized for the delay and the way the security men handled the situation. He explained that these procedures are necessary for safety measures due to the present security situation in Iraq. My cousin Lubna was shaken though was relived once they let us leave. Even though I was disturbed by the way the security men dealt with the situation, I appreciated the official's cooperation and support. Overall, I was impressed by these security measures since the situation dictated their necessity.

In 2004, the three of us were able to walk from my aunt's house to the city center as well as roam the city square freely. Community members volunteered to perform various security tasks throughout *Muharram.* Local security forces were dispersed through out the city center. The U.S. and Polish soldiers could only be seen in their tanks patrolling the outskirts of the city by night. Even after the series of bombings in the city square, the city bustled with pilgrims. In contrast, both of my cousins assert that today Karbala has become a ghost town. They both confessed that they have not been to the city square in months (even though it is walking distance from their home). Lubna mentioned that the city square has been deserted since the April 2007 bombings, except for the Iraqi police roaming its streets. She confirmed that the Coalition Forces only dare come out at night to perform raids. Both Lubna and Luma fear for their lives since the violent situation in Karbala has become intolerable. Hence, they confirmed that they lock themselves indoors and only leave their home to go to work. Luma's husband fled Karbala to Syria after male members of his family were killed, leaving behind him his wife and child. They both asserted that the lack of water and electricity has compounded the situation and made it intolerable, especially in the summers when the temperature

sores. Lubna, Luma, my aunt and her husband are trying to leave Karbala to any of the neighboring countries (Egypt, Syria, Jordan) for refuge. They hope to use the host country as a temporary residence until they can immigrate to the West. Hence, their upcoming departure marks the last immigration phase of my mother's family.

In this chapter, I have illustrated the Karbala narratives' ritualistic approach of transporting the pilgrims across time and space. I have also explored a similar approach in the exhibit and thesis. I employed *this* method as a reflection of my own experiences with time and space due to several displacements. I have also represented women's ritualization of creative practices as locales for religious, political and cultural expressions. Furthermore, I typified the Karbala city square in 2004 for these women and the community at large, as sites for reclamation of cultural and religious identities. Finally, I demonstrated how these women and communities channel these creative practices into a political and religious resistance framework.

Conclusion

The Fourth and Final Room: Reflections

> A women's personal altar evokes her particular - her intimate - relationship to the divine, human, and natural realms. There she assembles a highly condensed, symbolic model of connection by bringing together sacred images and ritual objects, pictures, mementos, natural materials, and decorative effects which represent different realms of meaning and experience-heaven and earth, family and deities, nature and culture, Self and Other. By actively engaging the Divine at this self-created sacred place, she makes her altar a living instrument of communication, a channeling device for integration, reconciliation, and creative transformation.
>
> Kay Turner[166]

The Offering Room

The offering room is the last room in the installation. I will walk you (the reader) metaphorically through this room using the present tense as a stylistic expression in order to draw you into the experience (as I have done in the last three chapters). I use the metaphor of reflection in this room as a means of transition to my concluding remarks of the project, which are reflective in nature.

An elongated dimmed hallway extends from the second room to the fourth room. Walking down the softly lit corridor you encounter the exit way on the left side, which is covered with a black gauzy fabric (similar to the one used in the silhouettes). Suddenly you notice a glow emanating from the end of the hallway at the left hand side which draws you towards it. As you approach the source of the glimmering, the hidden fourth room is revealed to you (Refer to Figure I.6). The secluded small cubical room is the offering space (similar to an altar). I have been influenced by altar art (traditionally rooted in Catholic and Latin cultures) while living in the Bay Area, California. My encounters with Latino/Latina creative and spiritual practices have shaped my own, though the offering room is not a direct expression of altar art. It is mainly influenced by the offering tables and installations, which I have witnessed while growing up, made by

women in Iraqi Shi'a households. Against the back wall, a three asymmetrical tiered structure to the dimensions of approximately H: 0.95m x L: 0.70m x W: 0.75m centrally rests. I found the wooden tiered mantelpiece in the storage area of the theater room at the AUC.

Two bronze hands of Fatemeh engraved with Arabic calligraphy rest atop of each corner of the structure. The inscriptions are several Islamic proverbs, though one of them refers to 'Ali: "No lad except for 'Ali. No sword other then *Thul-Fuqar* (the name of 'Ali's sword)." Suspended from the wall above the pedestal, a speckled iridescent framed mirror hangs. Sprinkled golden and silver leaves were superimposed on the dark colored frame. The mirror frame consists of hues of jade with ruby colored arabesque designs. I worked closely with a specialized craftsman to design and implement the framed mirror. A black hand-written proverb in Arabic text on the upper part of the frame reads: "Every day is *'Ashura* and every place is Karbala." This proverb was utilized to demonstrate both how the Karbala calamity and my own work attempt to transcend the boundaries of time and space.

An exquisite multicolored patched fabric drapes over the wooden construction. The patch work of the vibrant textile embraces varied embroidery designs. The patched cloth hue is mainly amethyst, ruby and indigo with splashes of crimson, emerald and golden pieces. Silver and golden threads interlace throughout the dazzling material. The glittery fabric is erratically embellished with little rounded mirrors. I borrowed the fabric from a friend who had acquired it from a visit to India. Lit candles in multihued glass containers adorned the shimmering fabric and surround the entire structure illuminating the offering room while enhancing the light spectacle. I found the glassware in a store in

one of the alleyways in *Khan El-Khalili*. Yellow flowers similar to the ones used in the miniature replica shrine, used by the four men described in Chapter three (refer to page 128), were sporadically sprinkled over the tiers of the structure. Multihued glass plates containing an assortment of herbs such as thyme, sage and other aromatic plants as wells as sweet scented incenses, rose petals and candy bejeweled the fabric. On one side of the platform, a purple vase embracing pink flowers and a silver incense burner rest on the ground. The sweet scented incense fumes diffuse throughout the entire installation rooms, spreading outside of the gallery space.

The mixture of incense, herbs, dried flowers, silver incense burner were given to me by my mother, uncles, aunt and cousin during a visit I made to U.A.E shortly before the opening night. Different family members flew from various parts of the world to attend my cousin's wedding ceremony, but mainly to visit my aged grandmother and aunt who recently emigrated from Iraq to U.A.E in response to the escalating violence that has engulfed Iraq. My family members had bought all the ingredients for my cousin's offering spread for the wedding ceremony. Hence, they gave me all the extra ingredients since they had abundant amounts. My uncle Hassen and Husayn provided an assortment of incenses; my cousin Ala offered the silver incense burner and my aunt and mother supplied a variety of dried flowers, candy, aromatic plants and herbs. Each one of them offered different items to be placed on the offering mantelpiece even though they were perplexed with my interpretation of them since these items are not specifically used during *'Ashura* in the manner in which I use them. The contribution and offering made by various family members who are forced to live in the diaspora, (who are dispersed around the globe and gather erratically after years of separation at my cousin's wedding) seemed

to be indicative of my project. Hence, their contributions are scattered throughout the offering room, which I found to be a cathartic process.

Reflection Space

The fourth room was designed as the final stage and the finale of this simulated experiential sacred journey into *'Ashura* as ritual and art across time and space. The secluded multi-sensory room, where the entrancing voice of the *Radoud* can still be heard, the potent aromatic scents saturate the senses even more then before, the soft candle lights and the vibrant ambiance including the mirror, all contribute to instigating the meditative mood and reflective disposition. Tarek Al-Akkad shares his experience of the fourth rooms:

> As I walked through the exhibit, the light changed from bright to dim, to the shimmering candles (...) at the far end of the gallery. Your lit candles display was the climax of the show and was successfully done in a way that changed the mood of the visitor. The overall feel was like meditating in a place of worship. I never knew that Ashura could be so colorful and festive. You knew how to combine the joyful feelings of the celebration with the sorrow memory of the death of al-Husayn.[167]

The reflection of one's image in the mirror is meant to induce a reflective temperament. Hence, I use the metaphor of reflection in the room to shed light on my own reflections on the project by concluding.

The fourth room, and specifically standing still in front of the multi sensory spectacle and mirror, is suggestive of the cyclical theme I elaborated on throughout the exhibit space of journeying across time and space until one reaches a fixed juncture which prompts reflection. By placing the mirror over the offering mantelpiece, which reflects the audience's image, it was meant to bring on the introspective reflection, (which I detailed throughout the chapters) which might stimulate a transcendental experience, similar to what pilgrims might encounter at fixed points (such as the shrine in

room and chapter two and the fixed photographs in room and chapter three) on their sacred journeys. The fourth room is designed to be a solitary space aiding audience members to benefit from their last moments in this reflective journey. Jalaa' Abdelwahab offers his interpretation of the fourth room:

> [The fourth and final room] The room with the altar and incense was harder to relate to and understand for someone not so familiar with the context of *'Ashura,* but the candles, the spices, the colors, the smell radiating from there brings you closer to moments of meditation and recollection.[168]

Hours before the opening night, I sneaked into this room and lit the candles and incense and made an offering to my family and members of my various communities, as well as to all those who have died and the ones who continue to struggle as a consequences of the last thirty odd years in Iraq and its diaspora.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I stress the importance of using 'narrative' of the particular to give voice to the dynamic, complex and varied human experiences. I have been also writing against the notion that culture and identity are fixed and a part of a monolithic organized structure. Hence, the thesis, the installation, and the forthcoming film, all attempt to challenge fixed and monolithic categories by creating new fluid ones. I see the projects themselves as not merely tools to alter perceptions or construct a narrative, but also as sites of resistance.

Throughout the thesis, I aimed to transport the reader (similar to what I attempted to do for the audience) into the realm of the sacred by inviting the reader to embark on a journey through my exhibit: "Sacred Spaces." I have, moreover, offered an innovative approach to anthropological study that fuses both the creation of a multi-sensory and experiential installation as well as a written thesis to highlight the multifaceted

perspectives needed for the study of such a subject. Here, I attempt to weave multiple narratives through the use of the sacred as ritual and art in order to construct a story that offers creative practices as sites of healing and resistance.

Furthermore, I have highlighted how the ritualization of creative practices demonstrates a way of thinking, expressing and imagining that can empower these women (as well as for myself) and reconnect them to their emotions and the community. I have attempted to shed light on the female experience of this cultural and religious discourse which speaks about the plight of the Shi'ite history of suffering and of seeking redemption through solidarity and resistance. I have, therefore, highlighted how '*Ashura* evokes history on a number of levels (the Karbala Battle in 680 A.D., Shi'a oppression throughout history, and how it relates to the present crisis), and when women participate in it, they commemorate that history and are empowered by it. At the same time, I have established how '*Ashura* commemorations, such as the *Qirayeh, allow* women to express their emotions, emotions that partly deal with the present situation they inhabit in a language that is overtly religious.

In Shi'ite martyrology, women such as Zaynab and Fatemeh are central to the sacred. Hence, I recollect commemorations by women (such as the *Qirayeh)* in order to demonstrate the intricate relationship between their creative practices, rituals and the sacred. I therefore propose that the sacred as an analytical tool needs to be re-examined within the discipline of anthropology. Feminist anthropologists may benefit from exploring Shi'ite ritualization of creative practices which centers the female and provides an approach that bases the experiences of women within its tool-box. In this thesis, I have established that narratives, rituals and creative expressions, practiced by these women

(and myself), can contribute methodologically to studies of memory, trauma and healing. By focusing on women's experiences and creative practices, I challenge trauma-centered research methods which mainly concentrate on sharing interviews of women who have survived painful events such as war and displacement. Hence, I attempt to revamp methods used to examine traumatic events by centering women's stories and creative practices as tools to channel collective creativity in order to empower, heal and transform a community. I make use of Shi'ite ritualization of creative expressions to create a mixed and multi-media artistic and analytical project which reconstructs painful histories into an imaginative and celebratory enterprise. I create a setting whereby I explore creative practices which provide a concrete place to theorize from praxis on trauma, memory, narrative, healing and Shi'a rituals.

The project is a vehicle for communication, an approach for commemoration and an expression of creative practices contributing towards healing and transformation. By providing an experiential walk through the exhibit space and a vivid account in the thesis, I have utilized both the thesis and art installation as mediums to communicate a marginalized history of Iraq, Shi'ism, *'Ashura,* war, displacement, women's experiences and my own. By employing *'Ashura*, I have applied an approach for commemoration, to reveal a silenced narrative of women's voices and experiences. The long history of artistic and creative practices and adaptations within Shi'ism has influenced my own work in that it has provided insight into how these imaginative expressions play a central role in nurturing healing mechanisms and providing methods for transformation. Hence, Zaynab and the women I focus on in my chapters have utilized narratives and creative practices as tools to keep a memory alive, make sense of unfathomable experiences,

instigate change, and achieve catharsis through creatively healing their own traumas. These women have demonstrated through their experiences and creative practices their strength and resilience.

This project attempts to remember, revitalize and reinvasion marginalized histories through the narratives and stories of my female family members and my own.[169] Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains the process of creativity and creation in the following:

> The project of creating is about transcending the basic survival mode through using a resource or capability which every indigenous community has retained throughout colonization – the ability to create and be creative. The project of creating is not just about the artistic endeavors of individuals but about the spirit of creating which indigenous communities have exercised over thousands of years. Imagination enables people to rise above their own circumstances, to dream new visions and to hold on to old ones. It fosters inventions and discoveries, facilitates simple improvements to people's lives and uplifts our spirits. Creating is not the exclusive domain of the rich nor the technologically superior, but of the imaginative. Creating is about channeling collective creativity in order to produce solutions to indigenous problems. Every indigenous community has considered and come up with various innovative solutions to problems. That was before colonialism. Throughout the period of colonization indigenous peoples survived because of their imaginative spirits, their ability to adapt and to think round a problem.[170]

Both the exhibit and *this* thesis are reflective in nature. They aim at achieving a set of collective and personal goals. The collective goals attempt to narrate and reclaim a history, celebrate the survival of a community, repaint traumatic events, and story-tell women's experiences through revitalizing creative practices. Personally, I aspire towards restoring my multiple familial histories by reframing my own diasporic identity in order to weave a tapestry of migratory experiences.[171]

I realized that only by constructing the "Sacred Space" exhibit first, and then writing about it, I was able to fully grasp some of the non-verbal meanings behind my endeavor. It became clear to me after building the installation—which was both a non-verbal and verbal creative practice—how to vocally and analytically articulate my thesis. The practice of creating the exhibit—both conceptually and physically—seems to emerge

from a non-verbal space within myself. In contrast, writing the thesis materialized through orally engaging with others, reading texts, and methodologically working through the project. Both processes complemented each other, resulting in a more fluid understating of the project and my endeavor.

Notes

[1] Karbala is a city in Iraq, situated approximately fifty-five miles southwest of Baghdad, on the western bank of Euphrates and at the right side of Husainiya creek. It witnessed the bloody battle that took place in 680 A.D. between the army of the Umayyad Caliph Yazid Bin Mu'awiya and Imam Husayn—the son of Ali and the grandson of Prophet Mohammed—and his followers, who were on route to claim leadership over Kufa. This battle resulted in the brutal massacre of all male members of *ahl-al-bayt*—the house of the Prophet, while women were taken as *sabaya* (captives). The city has become a sacred place of pilgrimage—both physical and spiritual—for the redemption of suffering by Shi'ite Muslims.

[2] The rituals commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn by Shi'ites take place every year on the 10th of Muharram of the Muslim Hijri Lunar month, and last for forty days. The ritual commemoration may involve the physical or spiritual pilgrimage of Shi'ites to Karbala, where the battle of Karbala took place in 680 A.D. The massacre of Husayn and his seventy two followers in Karbala is the central point of the Shi'a narrative.

[3] Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat, "Introduction," *Dangerous Liasons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives,* eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 2.

[4] Homi K. Bhabha, "The World and the Home," *Dangerous Liasons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives,* eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 448.

[5] Catherine Clement and Julia Kristeva, *The Feminine and the Sacred* (Palgrave P, 2001), 1-2.

6 *'Ashura* takes place during the month of Muharram which is the first Muslim Hijri Lunar month

7 Umayyad *khalifa* Yazid Bin Mu'awiya sent his troops to eliminate Imam Husayn and his 72 followers in 680 A.D. in Karbala.

[8] Before the emergence of the state of Iraq, citizens of Iraq had either an Ottoman *taba'iyya* (affiliation) or Iranian *taba'iyya.* Some Iraqis chose the Iranian *taba'iyya* even though they were not of Iranian descent because it could lead to avoiding the Ottoman draft.

[9] Customarily a request is made to one of the Imams, followed by a pledge by the petitioner to offer something in return if the wish is granted.

[10] Alan Morinis, ed. *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1992) ix-x.

[11] Alan Morinis, 2.

[12] Lara Z. Deeb, "From Mourning to Activism. Sayyedeh Zaynab, Lebanese Shi'i Women, and the Transformation of Ashura," *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*, ed. Kamran Scott Aghaie (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005) 241.

[13] One of the most prominent transnational eulogies chanter and bard (*Radoud*) in modern Shi'a traditions.

[14] He is one of the main sources of references for the Karbala narratives.

[15] Laura Lengel, "Intercultural Communication and Creative Practice: Resistance, Convergence, and Transformation, *Intercultural Communication and Creative Practice. Music, Dance and Women's Cultural Identity,* ed. Laura Lengel (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2005) 4-5.

[16] Laura Lengel, 4.

[17] Qtd. in Laura Lengel, 11.

[18] Ruba Salih, *Gender in Transnationalism. Home, longing and belonging among Moroccan migrant women.* (New York: Routledge, 2003) 119.

[19] Laura Lengel, 6.

[20] Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002) 4.

[21] Rosalind Shaw, 5.

[22] Rosalind Shaw, 5.

[23] Rosalind Shaw, 7.

[24] Howard Morphy, "The Interpretation of Ritual: Reflections from Film on Anthropological Practice," *Man*, New Series 29 (1) Mar. 1994: 117-146.

[25] Howard Morphy, 132.

[26] Selma Leydesdorff, "Introduction to the Transaction Edition. Gender and Memory Ten Years On," *Gender and Memory,* eds. Selma Leydesdorff, Luisa Passerini and Paul Thompson (New Brunswick, N J: Transaction Publishers, 2005) xii.

[27] Selma Leydesdorff, xii.
[28] Selma Leydesdorff, xi.
[29] Linda Basch, Nina Glick Shiller and Cristina Blanc-Szanton, eds. *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Luxembourg: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers1995) 3.
[30] Linda Basch, et al., 7.
[31] Sean R. Roberts, "Toasting Uyghurstan: Negotiating Stateless Nationalism in Transnational Ritual Space," *Contesting Rituals: Islam and Practices of Identity-Making*, Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, eds. (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2005) 148.
[32] Selma Leydesdorff, x.
[33] Selma Leydesdorff, xiv.
[34] Ruba Salih, 124.
[35] Ruba Salih, 125.
[36] Ruba Salih, 125.
[37] Ella Shohat, "Post – Third Worldist Culture: Gender, Nation, and the Cinema," *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices*, Ella Shohat, ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 290-291.
[38] Rosemary Sayigh, "Gender, Sexuality, and Class in National Narrations: Palestinian Camp Women Tell Their Lives," Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies 19 (2), Varieties of Women's Oral History, (1998): 167.
[39] *Al Mahdi* is the twelfth and current *Imam* of Shi'a Muslims. *Al Mahdi* went into occultation in 874 A.D. He will reappear to guide the people into salvation at the end of the temporal world
[40] Kamran Scott Aghaie, ed. *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005) 10.
[41] William O. Beeman, "Cultural Dimensions of Performance Conventions in Iranian Ta'ziyeh," *Ta'ziyeh Ritual and Drama in Iran,* Peter Chelkowski, ed. (NY: NY University Press and Soroush Press, 1979) 25.
[42] William O. Beeman, qtd. in Peter Chelkowski, 26.
[43] William O. Beeman, qtd. in Peter Chelkowski, 25.
[44] William O. Beeman, qtd. in Peter Chelkowski, 25.
[45] Veena Das, "Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain," *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, eds. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (Blackwell Readers in Anthropology) Ed: (UK,Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, 2006) 327-328.
[46] Peter Chelkowski, "Ta'ziyeh: Indigenous Avant-Garde Theatre of Iran," *Ta'ziyeh Ritual and Drama in Iran,* Peter Chelkowski, ed. (NY: NY University Press and Soroush Press, 1979) 2.
[47] Peter Chelkowski, 2.
[48] Faleh A. Jabar, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq* (London: Saqi Books, 2003) 189.
[49] Faleh A. Jabar, 185.
[50] Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of 'Ashura in Twelver Shi'ism* (The Netherlands: Mouton Publishers, 1978) 148.
[51] William L. Hanaway, JR., "Stereotyped Imagery in the Ta'ziyeh," qtd. in Peter Chelkowski, 188.
[52] Mahmoud Ayoub, 142.
[53] Jalaa' Abdelwahab, Personal interview, via email on October 18, 2007.
[54] Jalaa' Abdelwahab, Personal interview, via email on October 18, 2007.
[55] The physical pilgrimage to Karbala.
[56] Alan Morinis, 9.
[57] Communitas as defined by Victor Turner is "the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints…enacting a multiplicity of social roles, [while] being acutely conscious of membership in some corporate group such as family, lineage, clan, tribe, nation, etc., or of affiliation with some pervasive social category such as class, caste sex, or age division." Qtd. in Samer El-Karanshawy, *The Day the Imam was Killed: Shi'ism, Texts, Muharram Rituals and the Meanings of Karbala,* PRS-Transfer Paper, (London: University of Oxford Press, 2002), 143.
[58] Alan Morinis, 8-9.
[59] Qtd. in Samer El-Karanshawy, *The Day the Imam was Killed: Shi'ism, Texts, Muharram Rituals and the Meanings of Karbala,* PRS-Transfer Paper, (London: University of Oxford Press, 2002) 140.
[60] Victor Turner, qtd. in Samer El-Karanshawy, 140-141.

[61] Incense is used in many religious and cultural ceremonies for its aroma, healing effect, and spiritual qualities. A month before the opening of the exhibit, I went to U.A.E to attend a family function. My grandmother and aunt had fled from Iraq, my mother came from the U.S., and my uncle from the U.K. My other uncle and other family members now live in U.A.E. Each member of the family contributed material objects to the altar, or offering room—the 4th room—which included the incense burner, various kinds of incenses, charcoal, spices, herbs, and other materials to be presented as offerings. Sandalwood is my chosen sacred incense.
[62] Mahmoud Ayoub, 148.
[63] Peter Chelkowski, 9.
[64] Samuel R. Peterson, "The Ta'ziyeh and Related Arts," qtd. in Peter Chelkowski, 76.
[65] Faleh A. Jabar, 185.
[66] William L. Hanaway. JR, qtd. in Peter Chelkowski, 188.
[67] A woman who is trained to perform religious ceremonies.
[68] The project appears to predate the Ba'th's totalitarian practices: "With the inception of the modern state in Iraq, Arab Nationalism replaced Islam as a political focus of allegiance and unity. (...). These secular trends, (...), were constructed in order to achieve at least three aims: to remove religious unity by stressing the ethnic division of Arabs from Turks and later from Persians; to overcome the Christian-Muslim divide among Arabic-speaking people in the Mashriq; and to reconstruct history in order to establish the claim to nationhood is a recurrent element in modern nationalism. (...).
These discourses involved inherent contradictions within both Sunni and Shi'i Islam. First, they reduced Islam to a predicate to ethnicity, thus destroying the centrality of religion, (...). Lastly, the glorification of past empires implied the legitimation of Sunni dynasties and contradicted the essence of Shi'i Islam revolving around the legitimacy of the household of Imam Ali." Faleh A. Jabar, 68.
[69] Faleh A. Jabar, 201.
[70] Faleh A. Jabar, 214-215.
[71] Faleh A. Jabar, 215.
[72] Faleh A. Jabar, 274.
[73] Zainab Al- Suwaij, *The Iraqi Holocaust Files*, "I Was One of the Rebels," The Iraqi Holocaust Files, 22 July 2004, accessed 7 June 2007 <http://iraqshoahfiles.blogspot.com/2004/07/zainab-al-suwaij-i-was-one-of-rebels.html>.
[74] *Shabih* literally means someone who looks alike. It is in reference to amateur actors performing the passion plays. These actors perform the events which took place in Karbala 680 A.D. By personifying Imam Husayn and his 72 followers, these actors provoke a sense of engagement from the audience.
[75] Faleh A. Jabar, 189.
[76] Community members re-enact the battle of Karbala through live performances.
[77] Black clothing that covers the entire body from head to toe.
[78] Chosen Ones, or Holy Ones. Infallible.
[79] *Art and People* was an Iranian monthly-published journal, which illustrated Persian Lithographic Editions of the *Shahname*, 14, 162 (2535/1976).
[80]Mohammad Bahr Al-Uloom, *10th Muharram, 1415*, 20 June 1994, March 18, 2007 <http://www.ashura.com/thm_c.html>.
[81] "*Tales of Imam Hussain's Martyrdom*," © 2000 www.ashura.com, 5 December 2007 <http://www.ashura.com/thm_part11.html>.
[82] An image from Michael Jordan's book: *Islam: an Illustrated History* (London: Carlton Books Ltd., 2002) 64.
[83] Bassem Al-Karbalai, "This is what I have read," *From the poets of the Husayni manbar, on lamentation Imam Husayn* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Al-Qarea, 2005) 9.
[84] Qtd. in Bassem Al-Karbalai, 9. Poem addressing Imam Husayn by Jaber Ibn Galeel Al-Kathemee (Fifteenth century). Husayn
[85] "Fifth name" is a reference to the five Chosen Ones in Hadith al kesa.
[86] "Prostrater" is a reference to 'Ali Zain el 'Abedeen, who was known to pray a lot.

[87] "The youth of Paradise" is a reference to a hadith of the Prophet, referring to Al-Hassan and Al-Husayn as such.Husayn.
[88] Peter Chelkowski, qtd. in Kamran Scott Aghaie, 129.
[89] Samuel R. Peterson, qtd. in Peter Chelkowski, 74-75.
[90] For more on the relation of Ta'ziyeh and Persian art, see Samuel R. Peterson, qtd. in Peter Chelkowski, 75.
[91] Samuel R. Peterson, qtd. in Peter Chelkowski, 75.
[92] Samuel R. Peterson, qtd. in Peter Chelkowski, 75.
[93] Bassem Al-Karbalai, 53.
[94] Qtd in Bassem Al-Karbalai, 54. Poem by Jaber Ibn Galeel Al-Kathemee (Fifteenth century). Al Kathemee is speaking on behalf of Sayeda Zainab, who is addressing her brother Imam Husayn.
[95] 'Hawra' literally refers to a woman characterized by whiteness of the eyeball, and blackness of the pupil. In this context, it is referring to her purity and beautiful eyes.
[96] *Art and People*, 14, 162.
[97] Qtd. in William A. Graham, "Islam in the Mirror of Ritual in the Development of Islamic Ritual," *The Development of Islamic Ritual,* ed. Gerald Hawting (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006) 360.
[98] Qtd. in Bassem Al-Karbalai, 9. Jaber Ibn Galeel Al Kathemee (Fifteenth century) is speaking to Imam Husayn.
[99] Mahmoud Ayoub, 18-19.
[100] Mahmoud Ayoub, 216-217.
[101] Mohammad Mohammadi Eshtehardi, qtd. in Kamran Scott Aghaie, 10.
[102] Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Tabari* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1964), V.5, 456. Qtd. in Samer El-Karanshawy, 23.
[103] Muhsin Al-Amin, *Lawa'ijj Al-Ashjan Fi Maqtal Al-Husayn*, Hasaan Al-Amin, ed., Samer El-Karanshawy, trans. (Beirut: Dal Al-Amir, 1996) 177.
[104] Kamran Scott Aghaie, 10.
[105] Urdu speaking poet residing in Great Britain, who writes commemorative poetry in honor of the martyrs of Karbala. 170.
[106] Syed Akbar Hyder, "Zaynab: The Conqueror of Damascus," qtd. in Kamran Scot Aghaie, 172.
[107] Syed Akbar Hyder, qtd. in Kamran Scot Aghaie,166.
[108] Mahmoud Ayoub, 188.
[109] Frank Lloyd Wright, qtd. in Alan Morinis, 3.
[110] Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994) 97.
[111] Yitzhak Nakash, 137.
[112]Taraneh Hemami, Information, Statement, accessed September 5th, 2007 http://www.taranehhemami.info/.
[113] Barbara Myerhoff "The Transformation of Consciousness in Ritual Performances: Some Thoughts and Questions," *By Means of Performance. Intercultural Studies of Theater and Ritual*, Richard Schechner and Willa Appel, eds. (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1990) 248-249.
[114] Wikipedia, "2 March 2004 Iraq Ashura bombings," accessed September 6th, 2007 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashoura_massacre.
[115] Mahmoud Ayoub, 24.
[116] Mahmoud Ayoub, 147.
[117] Alan Morinis, 5.
[118] Alan Morinis, 5.
[119] Alan Morinis, 2.
[120] Alan Morinis, 4.
[121] Alan Morinis, 4.
[122] Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aladine Publishing Company, 1969) 167.
[123] The terms used by President George Bush Junior to describe the concepts of operations for the military campaign waged during the invasion of Iraq in 2003.
[124] Kristen McNutt, Researcher, Association of Humanitarian Lawyers, Sexualized Violence Against Iraqi Women by US Occupying Forces. A briefing Paper of International Educational Development. Presented to The United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 2005 Session March, Geneva, 3.

[125] Anne H. Betteridge, "Specialists in Miraculous Action: Some Shrines in Shiraz," qtd. in Alan Morinis, 203-204.
[126] Linda Basch, Nina Glick Shiller and Cristina Blanc-Szanton, eds., 8.
[127] Linda Basch , et al., 8.
[128] Linda Basch , et al., 8.
[129] Linda Basch , et al., 8.
[130] Linda Basch , et al., 5.
[131] Linda Basch , et al., 9.
[132] Linda Basch , et al., 7.
[133] Linda Basch , et al., 8.
[134] Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America. Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 49.
[135] James Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthroplogy* 9 (3) 1994: 302-303.
[136] James Clifford, 304.
[137] Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction.* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001) ix.
[138] William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1 (1) 1991: 83.
[139] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference,* J. Rutherford ed. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990) 235.
[140] Stuart Hall, 236.
[141] Stuart Hall, 235.
[142] Stuart Hall, 236.
[143] Inderpal Grewal, 49.
[144] Khachig Tölölyan, "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment," *Diaspora* 5 (1) 1996:26.
[145] Khachig Tölölyan, 26.
[146] Ruba Salih, 119.
[147] Laura Lengel, ed., 10.
[148] Laura Lengel,10.
[149] Sturart Hall, 222.
[150] Laura Lengel, 4.
[151] Laura Lengel, 5.
[152] Selma Leydesdorff, 4; William Westerman, "Central American Refugee Testimonies and Performed Life Histories in the Sanctuary Movement," *Migration and Identity, International Yearbook of Oral History and Life Stories*, Rita Benmayor and Andor Skotnes eds. 2 (New Brunswick, N J: Transaction Publishers,1994), 167-81.
[153] Selma Leydesdorff, xiii.
[154] Alan Morinis, 26.
[155] Anne H. Betteridge, qtd. in Alan Morinis, 189.
[156] Alan Morinis, 27.
[157] Tarek Al-Akkad, Personal interview, Affiliate Faculty of Arts, Department of Performing & Visual Arts, American University in Cairo, via email on October 29, 2007.
158 Alan Morinis, 17.
[159] Ingvild Flaskerud, "Oh, My Heart Is Sad. It Is Moharram, the Month of Zaynab," "The Role of Aesthetics and Women's Mourning Ceremonies in Shiraz," qtd. in Kamran Scott Aghaie ,75.
[160] Alan Morinis, 22-23.
[161] Huda Lutfi, Personal interview, Professor of Arabic Studies, American University in Cairo. and a visual artist, via email on October 29, 2007.
[162] Peter Chelkowski, 5-6.
[163] Peter Chelkowski, 5-6.
[164] Ingvild Flaskerud, qtd. in Kamran Scott Aghaie, 65-66.
[165] Ingvild Flaskerud, qtd. in Kamran Scott Aghaie, 88.
[166] Kay Turner, *Beautiful Necessity, The Art and Meaning of Women's Altars* (Thames & Hudson Press, 1999) 27.

167 Tarek Al-Akkad, Personal interview, Affiliate Faculty of Art, Department of Performing & Visual Arts, American University in Cairo, via email on October 29, 2007.
[168] Jalaa' Abdelwahab, Personal interview, via email on October 18, 2007.
[169] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Decolonizing *Methodologies, Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books Ltd Press, 2004) 143-161.
[170] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 158-159.
[171] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 143-161.

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Appendix A
Reflections on the Project

I have to declare that this process of flattening out a three-dimensional art installation and creative practice on these pages has been extremely difficult. The process of writing this thesis in many ways seems contradictory to the creative practice of making art and dabbling with the concepts of the sacred and ritual. At the same time, attempting to bring in women's experiences and narratives have not proven to be sufficient to shed light on their holistic and experiential process with these topics. I utilized the themes of the sacred and ritual in making of the installation as a way to decipher unconscious manifestations in the hopes for catharsis and transformation. The exhibiting and making of the art project is in multiple ways a non-linear, non- discursive process. Barbara Myerhoff in her piece "The Transformation of Consciousness in Ritual Performances: Some Thoughts and Questions" suggests:

> The term consciousness focuses us on an individual, subjective state, rather than that of a collectivity or sociological relationship, which may of course also be transformed. In short, we are brought into an area where anthropology is traditionally weak and vague: the examination of subjective experiences, psychological states, non-normative and often unconscious information where maximum sensitivity, subtlety, inference and courage are required of an ethnographer, not to mention psychological sophistication and depth of experience in and knowledge of the language and culture in which observation are made. Many anthropologists have followed Max Gluckman's admonition and considered the psychological domain simply off-limits, a form of esoteric knowledge not with the expertise of anthropology.... But recently, physiological studies of ritual have suggested that the ineffability of intense emotional, transformative states may be due to the dominance of right brain activity. These states like dreams, are fundamentally non-linear, non-discursive, non-linguistic and are distorted beyond recognition when rendered in collective, verbal, conscious categories.... How are we to describe them if this is the case? New techniques, perhaps drawing or performing them, as is often done with dreams, may be required to study them.[1]

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[1] Barbara Myerhoff "The Transformation of Consciousness in Ritual Performances: Some Thoughts and Questions," *By Means of Performance. Intercultural Studies of Theater and Ritual*, Richard Schechner and Willa Appel, eds. (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1990) 245-246.

Hence, I suggest an experiential process for this category of study whereby participants are able to partake in the performances and or similar creative practices such as my own interpretations through the installation.

Appendix B
Audience's Reflections

Dena Al-Adeeb's *Sacred Spaces* is a deeply-felt response to a profound historical moment and its aftermath. In the form of a three-room [four-room] installation, the piece leaves room for an authentic audience reaction. Following a path strewn with coffin-like forms, the viewer is inexorably drawn into a dark, complex narrative of intertwined past and present. Evoking our basic human search for redemption, a mock shrine attracts us like a magnet, as around us spin Dena's photographs of modern *'Ashura* celebrations. This tension is significant: at the same time we search for the quiet center, we also hear the noise of voice and celebration. Once we regain our senses, we move on to welcome a contemplative ritual conclusion. This final space, made intimate by darkness, is strewn with candles and incense and memories. Here, the viewer remains for as long as is necessary – if not commemorating Dena's *'Ashura*, then one of her own.

It seems important to say that Dena's *Sacred Spaces* should not be confused with 'art', which would, instead, involve a further transformation away from the original historical events. No – Dena has produced what might be called 'experiential history', exploring both the buried past and its ongoing, very tangible remembrances. In this sense, the work crosses genres. It is neither history writing, nor personal account. Hanging delicately in the balance, *Sacred Spaces* takes the viewer on a journey, and in the process, gives all of us the powerful gift of resolution.

Ann Shafer[2]
Cairo 2007

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[2] Ann T. Shafer, Personal interview via email, Assistant Professor of Art and Art Program Director, Department of Performing and Visual Arts, American University in Cairo, via email on November 2nd, 2007.

Appendix C
Reflections on Experiences and Interviews

I found it interesting, ambiguous and sometimes confusing how different subjects negotiated their relationship to the regime, war, invasion, and post-invasion. Most, if not all, subjects opposed Saddam's regime. Most of them felt that the American invasion was a reality that they had to accept. But most were hopeful about the regime's removal from power. Different subjects felt differently about the United State's long-term stay in Iraq, and its consequences. But the majority wanted the United States to leave as soon as possible. It was interesting to find out that many participants saw these religious and cultural movements as outlets for the oppressed and the marginalized to express political dissatisfaction with the existing order. Just as the Iraqi nation state has been undermined, new configurations were created to displace the vacuum, which has forced religious and cultural movements to rise in its place. These movements are becoming a civil society that creates institutional frameworks of extensive networks of welfare, education, charitable, and spiritual associations that are transcending the boundaries of the nation state through a transnational movement.

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